

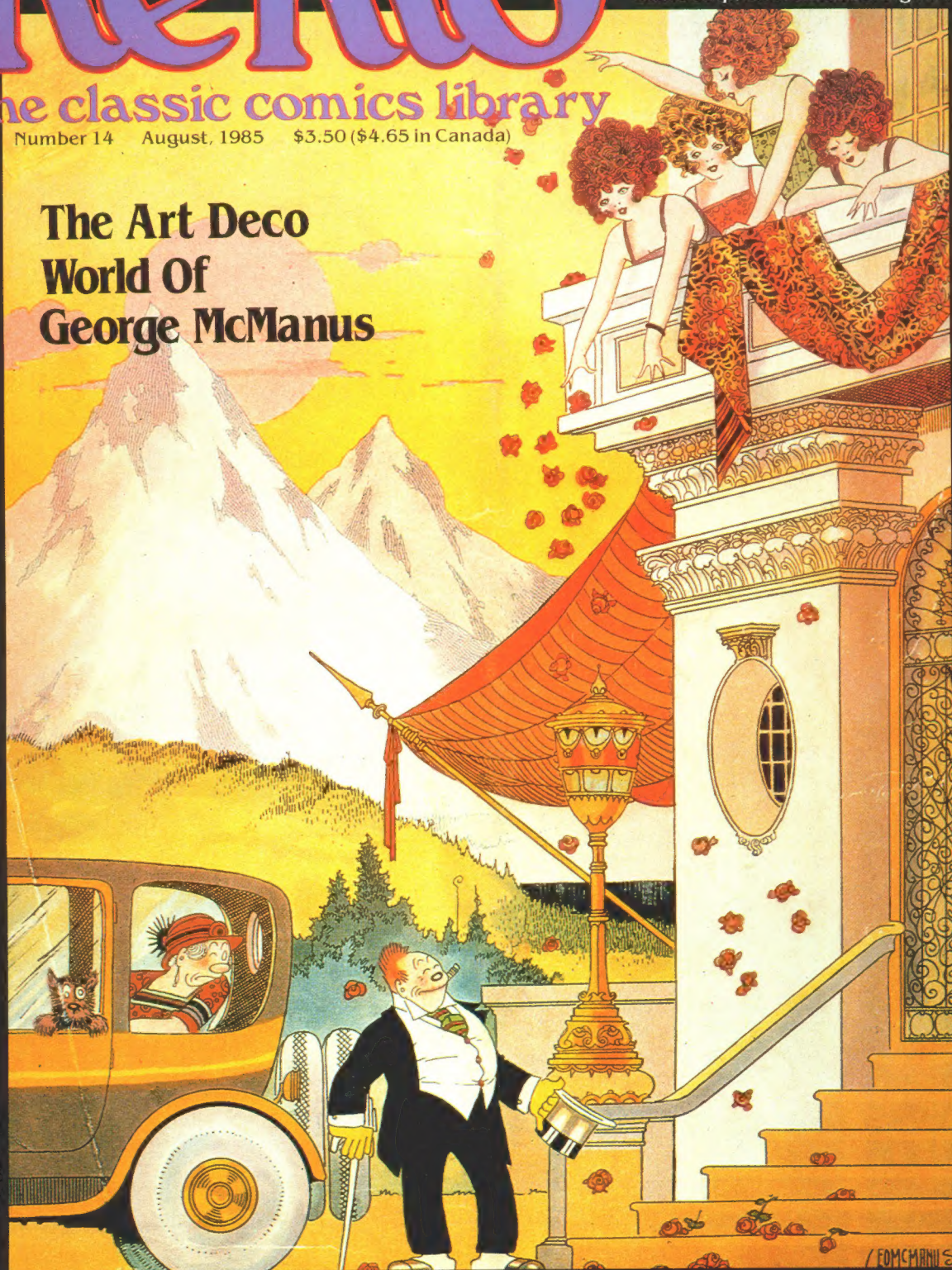
nemo

the classic comics library

Number 14 August, 1985 \$3.50 (\$4.65 in Canada)

The Art Deco World Of George McManus

THIS ISSUE: A complete *Hairbreadth Harry* adventure, *Moon Mullins*, *Sam's Strip*, and remembering *VIP*!





ONE McMANUS' MEAT IS ANOTHER MAN'S PERSIAN—George McManus adorned the cover of the unique King Features magazine *Circulation* in February, 1922, with a brilliant, full-color *Bringing Up Father* decoration. Almost three years later he received a gift from the Ahmed Khan of Persia—a six-by-five-foot hand-woven Oriental Rug in silk of the exact design. The tapestry took two years to complete, and was composed of a weave that required the tying of 990 knots per square inch. McManus is seen here in front of the full-color woven decorative cartoon.

NEMO contents

No. 14
AUG. 1985



Cover illustration by GEORGE McMANUS.
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ABOVE: The art of George McManus. BELOW: Moon Mullins.



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 - 2 Exclusive material on *Superman*, including the original Siegel/Shuster fanzine version. Also: *Terry* continued, Fred Harman, and Art Young.
 - 5 Big interview with Mort Walker. Also, *The Explorator*, Franklin Booth, *The Bungle Family*, and the Allen Saunders autobiography.
 - 6 An interview with Floyd Gottfredson, a clutch of classic *Alley Oop* pages, S.J. Perelman's cartoons, J.H. Donahey, plus the Saunders bio continues.
 - 7 Special Carl Barks issue, with six pages of full-color Barks work! Also, an interview with the Duck Man; rare animation art; Clare Briggs, *Smilin' Jack*, more.
 - 8 All-Little *Orphan Annie* issue, including a complete reprint of a 1929 tale, an analysis of the series, and a biography of Harold Gray. Full-color cover by Gray.
 - 9 Hal Foster interviewed, with a rare full-color Foster cover. Also, Joe Barbera of Hanna-Barbera interviewed, George McManus's *Nibsy the Newsboy*, and more.
 - 10 Christmas issue, with a portfolio of cartoonists' Christmas cards. Also, Gustave Verbeek's *Upside-Downs*, Mell Lazarus interviewed, Ray Ewer, and *Mutt and Jeff*.
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- annual 1** Giant 11" x 17" Screwball Comics Issue, with features on (and portfolios of) Gross, Dr. Seuss, *Smokey Stover*, and more!

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MILTON CANIFF'S pioneer adventure strip... DICKIE DARE!

The greatest adventure-strip cartoonist of all time cut his eye teeth in the legendary AP cartooning bullpen that also spawned Noel Sickles, Frank Robbins, Coulton Waugh, R.B. Fuller, and even Al Capp. *NEMO* #15 presents a full episode of Caniff's seminal feature, displaying his early range of artistic and writing talents on this exciting, rare strip.

Also—TIM TYLER'S *LUCK!* Javier Coma takes a look at this classic adventure strip, recounting the many escapades, as well as the many artists, associated with Lyman Young's exciting feature. Many illustrations!

MORE! Illustration historian Walt Reed profiles the sensuous, breathtaking fantasy-laden penwork of legendary illustrator Henry Clement Coll. . . *Hairbreadth Harry's* science-fiction adventure continues in a rare reprint of the strip. . . "Heroes of European Comics" continues with Jacques Tardi's compelling work and the fantasy of *Olivier Rameau*. . . and reviews of *Prince Vallant* and *Rudy*, as well as the continuing flashback saga of *Sam's Strip*!

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The Tenants Of Moonshine

Moon Mullins began his career, as he was to continue for decades to come, in the thick of things. On June 19, 1923, in *The New York News*, he made his entrance from a packing case, in the headquarters of Jack Dempsey's training camp ("Mitt me, Jack! Mitt me, kid!") like a gooney-bird from a Cancerian egg. Moon also emerged as a rival to Billy De Beck's *Barney Google*, popular champion of unabashed roughhouse, and a stinging challenge to the *News*'s flinty proletarian bearing. The opening *Moon Mullins* episode is a comic triptych: Moon's entrance is preceded by a panel showing his arrival—the packing case dumped on Dempsey's threshold, with a suspicious "Ugh!"—and by Moon's rocketing departure in the last panel, propelled by a canted foot and the words (in reply to Moon's eager appeal, "What'll ya give me, Jack?"): "The air!"

The blatant farce mechanism of that opening strip put all of Frank Willard's comic cards on the table, a prelude featuring every major motif, above all the embarrassment of too little space, and the endless temptations—and means—for outfacing that dilemma in a world filled with bumptious elbows and unwary eyes. The Mullinses and Plushbottoms would never, in Frank Willard's lifetime, have quite all the room they needed to live as agreeably as they imagined they wanted to. The originality of *Moon Mullins* is lodged in the truth that farce, as a form, flourishes on borrowed time and space: a street-fair of delusions and false impressions; of powers wrongfully acquired and spent; above all, of too little



A
Classic
Lowlife
Epic

room, and of pretensions of whose lease may not have too long a date. Throughout *Moon Mullins*'s tenure under his authorship, Frank ("Dok") Willard boosted and proclaimed what was most flagrantly synthetic and feckless in the form which nurtured his invention. The

by
Donald Phelps



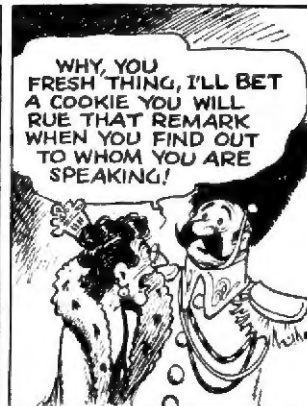
vigor of this ongoing performance, the burly cynicism of which never seemed to dislodge his fingertip purchase on his craft, were part of the mood which united Willard with his Moonshine.

He seemed to accept the contender's role against *Google* with the cheery, hammer-and-nails downrightness of Shakespeare's mechanicals setting up *Pyramis and Thisbe*. Moon himself was at first almost the diagrammatic opposite of Barney: hulking, with jutting jaw and smallish eyes; on the same principle, perhaps, that led Harold Lloyd astray when he first offered his Lonesome Luke character in challenge to Chaplin's Tramp image. Yet, later, Willard declared his individual orbit in a different way by incorporating Barney's features—banjo eyes, derby, and cigar—into the loutish height of Moon. This was a gesture, I'm convinced, not of simple, crass insolence but of Willard's increased assurance about Moon's character: a perennial layabout and vagrant, loping or stumbling into various turns of fortune—the remotest possible temperament from Barney's feverish appetite for survival-and-then-some, or yet, Barney's histrionic desperations and his secret, wistful instinct for domesticity. Willard's decision marked the assurance of *Moon Mullins'* permanent comic mood, which, unlike *Barney Google's*, was impregnable both to melodrama—despite occasional sorties into the '30s Chicago underworld—and sentiment.

Perusing the decades of continuity by the creators of *Moon Mullins* and *Barney Google* enforces my impression of a mutual recognition of, and respect for, both their differences and peculiar endowments. The recurrent evidences of borrowing and/or mutual influence suggest a comradely, across-the-corridor familiarity, rather than bare-toothed competitiveness. In the mid-'20s, while engaged

with his double, the Honorable Eric Van Horn, Barney clashes with the latter's uncle, a rascally patrolman named Homer Van Horn—the very walrus-moustached image of Lord Plushbottom, as he would presently be familiar to *Moon Mullins* readers. Uncle Willie Mullins, on his entry in 1927, much suggests a more genteel-mannered model for Fagan, who bulldozed his way into DeBeck's *Parlor, Bedroom and Sink* a year later. In the late '20s, Barney seeks out little Kokomo Klotz, grandson of Barney's friend and sometime protector, Horseface Klotz; only to discover a fusion of Huck Finn and a poltergeist who sports a ten-gallon hat but is otherwise the nerve-jangling twin of Moon Mullins's kid brudder, Kayo. And, on V-J Day in *Moon Mullins* we find the joint Plushbottom-Mullins menages queued up before a certain keyhole in hopes of spying out the Guy With The Green Gloves: a long-belated salute to Billy DeBeck's phantom playboy of numerous single panels in the '20s.

Moon Mullins owed its longevity, I believe, to Willard's extraordinary skill and aplomb at encasing his farce in a place that virtually reeks of domesticity's dank, secret age, a brooding, fetid, gone-to-seed gentility that bloomed among the too-often-sat-upon sofas and mildew-sprouting wallpaper of Emmy Schmaltz's boarding-house. This retreat housed the fumes—as permeating as those of cabbage and onion and the meatloaf's three-day travail—of ungainly, ill-disposed age. I was a child among people in their 40s, 50s, and 60s, the only young person I knew close at hand being my older brother; and, long before I could at all enjoy its humors, the visual and psychic authenticity of *Moon Mullins'* household were indelible to me. The place conveyed the sense of having been sprawled in, smoked in, used for centuries: a proper harbor



for water-logged, ancient vessels like Uncle Willie Mullins and Lord Plushbottom, like Aunt Mamie and Emmy herself. Far from a recognizable household, it was a dustbin, a gathering- or sweepingplace for personalities as divergent as those in a Renoir film. All seemed—and were—ready to straggle or scramble somewhere, anywhere, else at the shortest possible notice; as, indeed, they frequently did, with their *ad hoc* excursions to Florida or Mexico.

They seemed to have been hustled into their very roles, always with some spare garter or shirttail dangling. Lord Plushbottom in the most minor degree evolved from a prosperous, bewhiskered, and rather rangy squire of Moon's occasional girl-friend, Egypt, into the prototypical lapsed aristocrat outfitted with Wellington-mustaches. Those mustaches projected like bison horns at first, and then, with domestication, surrendered to a permanent droop. (Plushbottom had also been a theater-owner, and one of the most evocative names in comic strips takes on added scintillation, surely, from the image of Follies-era theater seats.) Emmy's unmatched crone face was capable of the most milk-curdling scowls or most winsome and wince-making simpers. Aunt Mamie was a washwoman out of the menageries of Daumier or George Belcher, et al. All are viewed with a hard freshness and firm distance, so that all the details of the characters were—much of it familiar from Basic Design texts—adds up to a compact display, funky-fecund William Hogarth, of the ways in which these people have been living, exhausting themselves, debauching, and tolling.

This faded jauntiness, a squirrel's nest courtliness, was carried into *Moon Mullins* by Willard from two previous features, drawn for Hearst. *The Outta-Luck Club* in the early '20s, pricked the *News'* Joe Patterson who was constantly alert to raffish comedy. Willard, signing himself "Dok," had also ghosted *Penny Ante*, the eclectic Jean Knott's boarding-house hash of Webster and Briggs. The wisecracks in *Moon Mullins* acquire, through the grace (a strange word; but, yes, bestowed advisedly) of the drawing, an unrelentingly exact sense of locale: a street-locale that communicates itself through the sketchy availability, the presence, of buildings and lamp-posts, a fire-hydrant or mail-box in attendance for proper service in either sense. (In Willard's case, the street setting is possibly, though not necessarily, Chicago: Willard's drug stores and bungalows, corner cops, and the indispensable rubber-neckers, could be, and surely owed something to, his home town, the Chicago suburb of Anna).

This setting permeates the stories and jokes, giving them remarkable flavor, a dry pungency that sets off the compact responses, the nicely dovetailed action/reaction, the off-hand, flat-hand violences that bolt the sequences into place. It offers a beautifully scaled stage for those Sennett-like excursions of Kayo, say, assuming charge over the Commodore (Moon's prospective, and by no means sanguine, father-in-law) in the unfortunate's lounge-chair; finally escalating the threat by hitching his hapless charge's chair to a merry-go-round. And it is a miniature stage, too, for those frieze-compositions that were regular ornaments of the daily strips in which Willard might display a whole chorus-line of porch-sitters, offering wise cracks, gossip glosses, or crisp sententiousness, about Moon's black factotum Mushroom paying his how-dos—a little snake-dance of wit and dry raillery. In every instance the street-set, with its storehouse of suggestion and tone, is kept in white-knuckled control, as are the actions going on in it. Grimy as Willard's streets may be, his performances are as spanking-clean as the action of boulevard farce. He reminds me in this of the raunchy, *ad hoc* style with which Jean Renoir presented *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, as *Le Journal du Dr. Hesselus*; and I might sigh that Renoir, while in Hollywood, never thought to raise his sights (except for *The Southerner*) above his soap-operas and swamp-operas to which he consigned himself, to undertake a *petit theatre* treatment of *Moon Mullins*. *Grande Illusion*, surely.

(Only after writing the above did I have occasion to see a delectably Moon-Mullinsish film that Renoir made in France at the outset of the '30s: *Boudu Saved From Drowning*, in which Michel Simon, a MoonshineUncle Willie fusion, sidles, capers, scoffs, and spits his way through the genteel household—and the rapidly de-escalating patience of his middle-class foster family—kicking up satyrs' heels belowstairs, while he is about it. And through his career even into *Le Petit Theatre de Jean Renoir*, he, like Willard, was a devout spectator in the theater of the everyday.)

Willard's sense of scale allowed him to summon a number of otherwise flat and inane jokes, vaudeville and barroom stories. A lot of the Sunday pages, also, for all their bustle, present the concision of anecdotes that Willard helped himself to from vaudeville like Moon himself at any free-lunch counter (his Dr. Izzie Pierre Cohen owes his name and presence to the favored vaudeville comic, Willie Howard); but he contributed a snap and come-uppance to his rhythms, rearranging the blowy materials with the brisk scissors



MOON MULLINS

by Frank Willard



October 14, 1934

and gluepots of the *collagiste*; assembling, but also arranging and giving point, in a kind of shorthand vaudeville anthology. The timing is as much a *presence* in these strips as in any I know, perhaps excepting Walt Kelly's *Sunday Pogo*, which itself owed no little to *Moon Mullins*, though paying its own way in sheer improvisational elan.

Moon Mullins is a study in the power of timing not as merely traffic-copping the material, but in converting it, lending tone to it, especially in conjunction with scene, and control of space, and the diagramming of responses in wonderful close order; so that what we in fact get is the extension of a sense of story beyond the anecdote's street-corner

concession dimensions. Action and reaction, by the way, usually occupy the same panel, and always are punctuated by Willard's near-elegant, parade-ground neat gestures. On a golf course, Moon approaches Mr. Spinach for some small assistance. "Ever try panhandling?" Moon gently inquires in response to the outcry by Mr. Spinach that he ought to be working. "NO!" is the anticipated, and given, reply, while the speaker addresses his niblick with the squared shoulders of indignation fortified by sense of presence. "Then," maintains Moon, sauntering away, cocking the stogie which he used with the aplomb and dispatch of Fred Astaire commanding both feet, "you don't know what hard work is." And in the last



December 29, 1935

panel, he is burying in state and laying a cabbage leaf upon the encounter, in his reply to his girl friend, who chides him about asking people for money: "Well," confides Moon, "you know how it is—just taking it without asking can get you into an awful lot of trouble." The entire episode, to be sure, could have been a typical "blackout" sequence in cabaret or in the Ziegfield Follies.

But Willard's art here is not defined and governed by vaudeville. It is his use of vaudeville to achieve a counter-tempo for the richer, more leisurely ongoing story that is proceeding through it, and which involves the privileged Miami community in which Moon-

shine is circulating, not measurably different from the Chicago suburban town in which he duck-paddled on Sundays. As in so much of Willard's other abounding continuity, often as Pickwickian as this, this routine of Willard's offers a somewhere-near-magical (at least if jugglers wield magic) approximation of watch-jeweled farcical give-and-take. In which a ream of dialogue from Moliere or Congreve is flicked off as neatly as—well, more so than—the ashes from Moon's cigar, as he bids a signature adieu.

The daily rhythms are a more compact treatment—though moored in the narrative continuity—of the Sunday pages' arabesques of



September 5, 1937

misadventure and missed encounters, those of which Walt Kelly was loving disciple. Strangest of all, and the best evidence of the characters' almost surreal placement, was that Moon, an unhoused wanderer when he walked onto the plank stage of his daily adventures, was a local boy indeed, a small-town bravo, in the Sunday productions. His kid brother, Kayo, chunkier and not so elfin-faced as he would become, was introduced—maybe plucked out of Moon's dresser drawer?—on a Sunday page of March 27, 1924, opposite the logo: "Meet the kid brother, 'Kayo' Mullins" (Uncle Willie similarly materialized in 1927).

I used the word "Pickwickian" above to

characterize the daily Mullins maneuvers, with, I think, the spirit of Dickens nodding me on; not only with a view to the cheerfully appropriated darkness and visual eccentricities of Crulshank and Leech, but also the straining and wrenching of the domestic fabric by Willie and his Lordship, often beyond the tolerance of poor Emmy and Mamie, all of which fed Willard's story-telling tempo. The essentially small-town cast seemed to be always in a kind of cyclotron which spun them into untoward reaches of rebellious adventure, then reassembled them—although, unlike Dickens's figures in his *denouements*, no more steady than before.



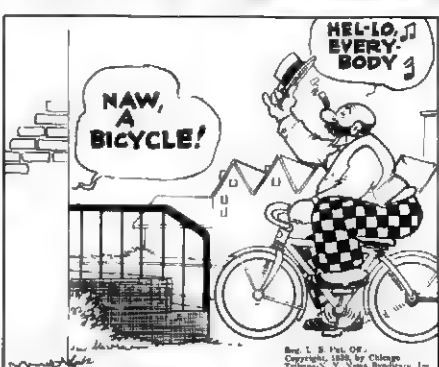
September 26, 1937

I was fascinated to learn that *Moon Mullins* had run, at one time, as a radio series. I can remember, probably in 1936, listening to a capsule dramatization of its Sunday pages, on a program called *See You in the Funnies*. I think. But what other medium could replace the one that Frank Willard elected, apart, perhaps, from the puppet stage or possibly the cabaret act? The sheer urbanity of Frank Willard's humor—adroit, super-casual, almost instinctive—marked the cohesive element of his style.

He never let his characters monopolize too much of their continuing show; and never, in that lethal fallacy of sentimentalists, gave

their innocence more credit than it warranted. Their innocence is of a piece with their style and faith in their own decorum and sense of priorities, which arms them against any *contretemps*—enough, at least, to guarantee their surviving for another day. Kayo sleeping in the bureau drawer; Aunt Mamie and Uncle Willie exchanging clothes after a tumble in the river (on one of their disaster-laden country excursions); his whiskery head showing above the lace collar of her Sunday print dress; she, looking much more at ease in his check-board suit, but keeping her plumed hat; or Mamie alone, reclining in a back-tilted kitchen chair, an unfurled banana in one hand

MOON MULLINS by Frank Willard

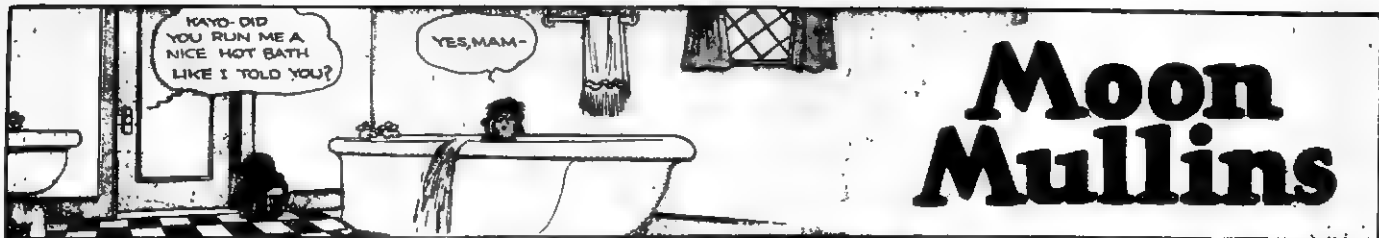


May 14, 1930

and a well-leafed copy of *Super Murder Comics* in the other—these images suggest genre pictures at an unpolished, unfondled level far closer than most such to the core-feelings of genre art. Nor are their most egregious and fatuous foils—including the occasional outright baddies, like Manny the Muscle or Count Strangler Bustavitch—outlined with the hostility and dread that characterize, say, Chaplin's opponents. Usually—like the Commodore, or the various doting matrons who are forcefully and finally disenchanted by "darling little Kayo"—they are themselves, in

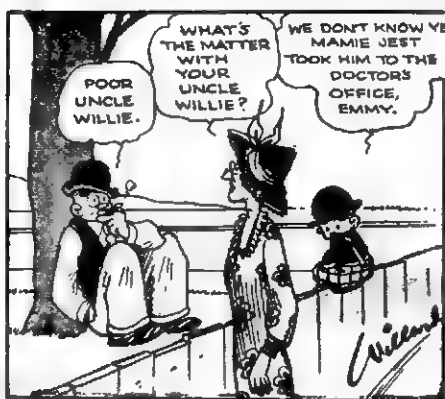
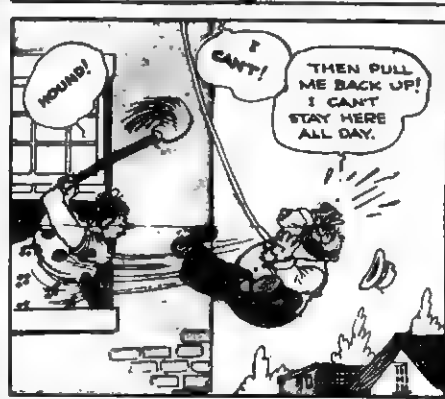
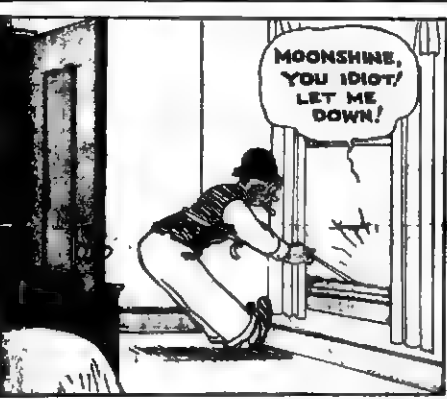
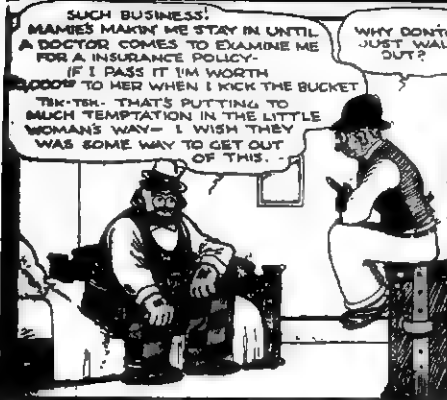
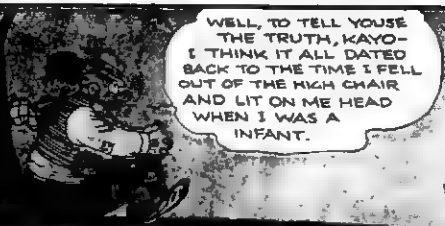
their dopey, fluttering serenity, as vulnerable, even at times as vagrantly sweet, as the Mullinses.

Yet such vulnerability, such sweetness, were simply the understood factors of Frank Willard's street-theater world, to be noted, entered among necessary observations, and passed by. They pertain to the inner life of his deadpan comedy, but never the covert, pimpish cozenings of "soft-hearted" sentimentality—which, too, Frank Willard, like Billy DeBeck, saw unflinchingly and at its exact worth.



September 1, 1929

Moon Mullins



HEY, MOON-!
THEY'S A BIG
TOUGH LOOKIN' GINK
OVER TO TH' HOUSE
LOOKIN' FOR YOU

DON'TCHA
THINK
I KNOW
IT?

Moon Mullins

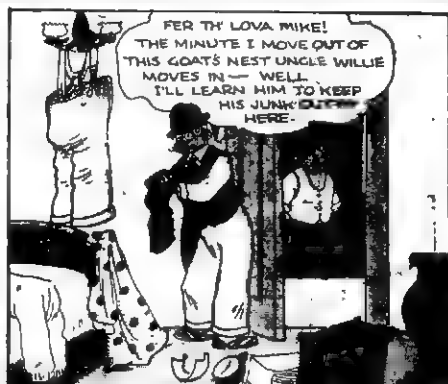


YAN-DER ROOM
JUST VERY SWELL,
BUT I TAKE IT.

WELL, YOU JUST MAKE
YOURSELF AT HOME WHILE I GO
OUT AND DO SOME MARKETING.
YOU WILL FIND IT NICE AND QUIET
HERE BECAUSE THE YOUNG MAN
THAT USUALLY OCCUPIES THIS
ROOM HAS GONE OUT OF
TOWN ON BUSINESS.



I'D BETTER TELL
EMMY I POSTPONED
THAT TRIP TO PEORIA
SO SHE CAN FIGURE
ME IN ON TH' HASH
TONIGHT.



FER TH' LOVA MIKE!
THE MINUTE I MOVE OUT OF
THIS GOAT'S NEST UNCLE WILLIE
MOVES IN - WELL,
I'LL LEARN HIM TO KEEP
HIS JUNK OUT
HERE.



THIS IS WHERE
I START
MY KALL
HOUSE CLEANIN'



OF ALL
TH
RUBBISH!



HELLO -
WHO'S THIS
FUNNY
LOOKIN' LIZZIE?
HAWHAWHAW -
AUNT MAMIE
SHOULD GET A
PEEK AT THIS.

VELL?



VELL,
DOT ISS DOT.
NOW I PHONE
FOR DER POLICE



HOLY M, SMOKE!
WHAT DID THAT
GUY CLOUT ME WITH?
IT FELT LIKE A
PIANO AND YET IT
LOOKED LIKE A
HAND.



I VUNDER
VERE HE COULD
OF VENT?
I HAD
DER DOOR
LOCKED WHEN
I WAS
TELEPHONIN'



SO LONG,
BIG BOY.
I GUESS
THAT'LL HOLD
YOU FOR A
WHILE.



WE GOT A
CALL THAT
THERES A
BURGLAR IN
MISS SCHMALTZ'S
PLACE, BANJOEYES.

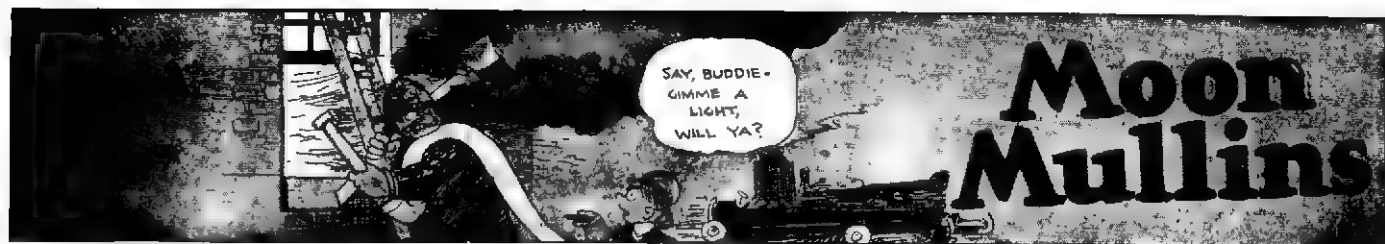
THERE HE IS, BOYS
BUT TAKE MY ADVICE
AND CALL UP THE
RESERVES.
THAT BABYS
A WHOLE
MOB BY
HISSELF



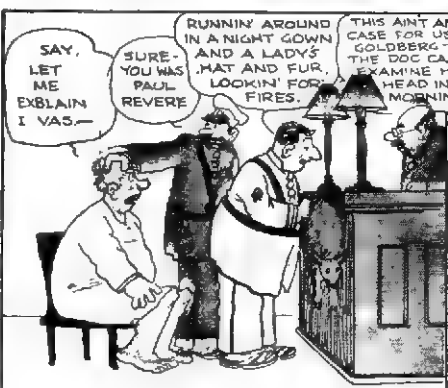
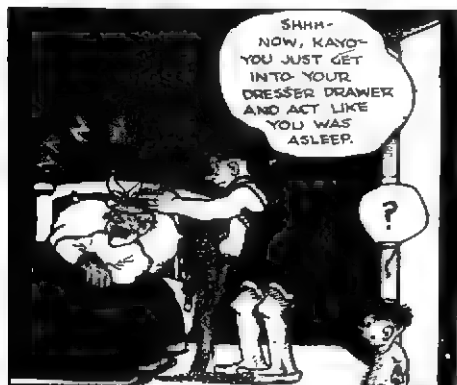
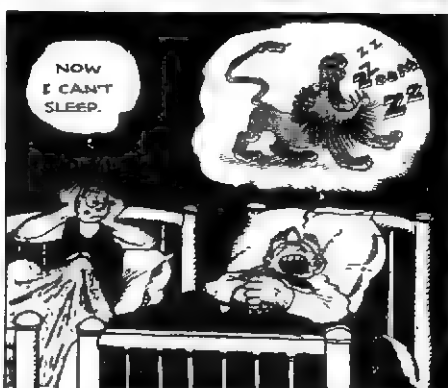
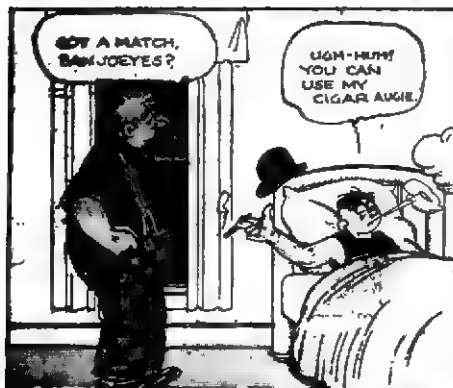
FOR HEAVENS SAKE,
MOONSHINE - WHEN DID
YOU GET BACK?
AND STOP PLAYING THAT THING -
I RENTED YOUR ROOM TO A
MR AUGIE SEIVERS.
A BIG PIANO MOVING MAN.
HE SAID HE'D BEEN
LOOKING FOR A NICE QUIET
PLACE WHERE PEOPLE KEPT
REGULAR HOURS
AND -

WELL, I'LL TELL
THE WORLD HE'S
FOUND IT NOW,
EMMY.
FAR BE IT FROM ME
TO BOTHER TH' BOY.

October 6, 1929



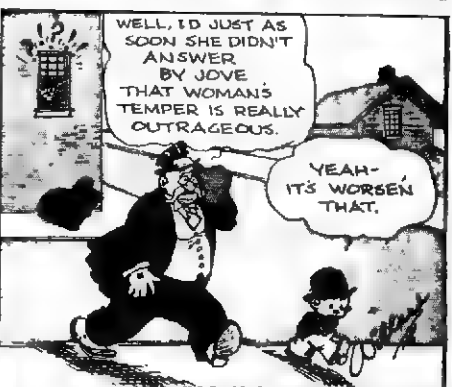
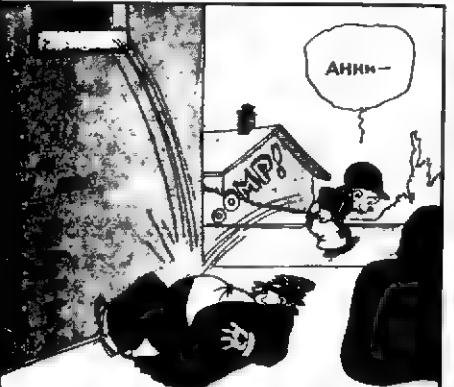
Moon Mullins

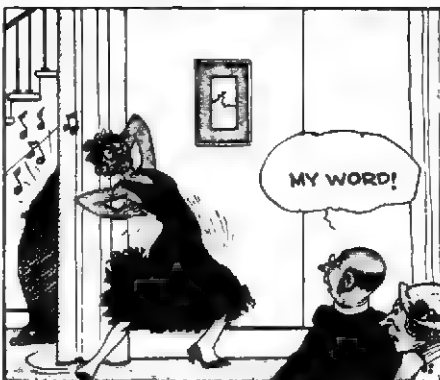
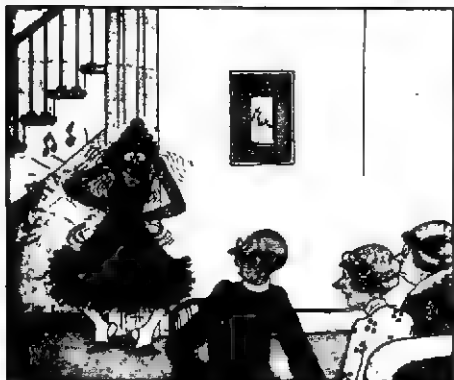
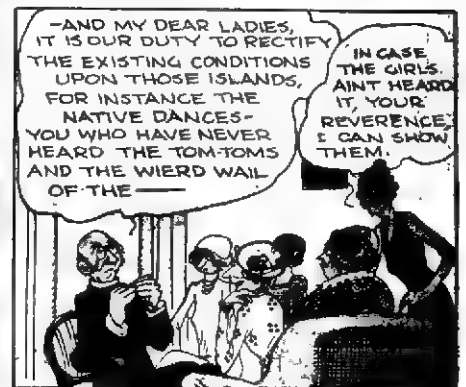


October 13, 1929



MOON MULLINS





George McManus's contributions to comics are well-known. He was a prolific artist who created many titles, each cleverer than the last—*Panhandle Pete*; *The Easy Money Girls*; *The Newlyweds*; *Let George Do It*; *Nibsy the Newsboy*; *Spareribs* and *Gravy*; *Their Only Child*; *Outside the Asylum*; *Bringing Up Father*; *The Whole Bloomin' Family*; *Rosie's Beau*; and *Snookums*.

And as an artist, George McManus has received attention for the remarkable

work of his later years—broad panoramas and detailed city scenes, intricate architecture, and the like. Much of

this detail-work—like the famous images of pictures on Jiggs's wall where

figures would throw balls between frames bore the mark of

McManus's talented assistant Zeke Zekeley. But preceding all this detail-

work, and directly responsible for it all, is the no-less-remarkable decorative work of

George McManus. From his earliest days he was enamored of art-deco, and he filled his strips with decorations, patterns, and designs. Elements like dresses, furniture, vases, and wallpaper became opportunities for

McManus to design swirling, eye-catching patterns. And in certain formats like the Sunday-page title strip and book covers, McManus utilized his design talents to their fullest.

In *NEMO* #9 we documented McManus's evident admiration of Winsor McCay, as he incorporated rococo elements and decorative motifs into his early *Nibsy the Newsboy*; perhaps that association was the genesis of McManus's fascination with such designs. Nevertheless he never lost his interest—or his deft handling of composition, and *Bringing Up Father* was all the richer for the classy, and classic, decoration that adorned its panels through the years.

So let us consider McManus the decorative artist in excerpted panels and special artwork from between 1919 and 1942.

—Rick Marschall

The Decorative Art Of

GEOMC MANUS

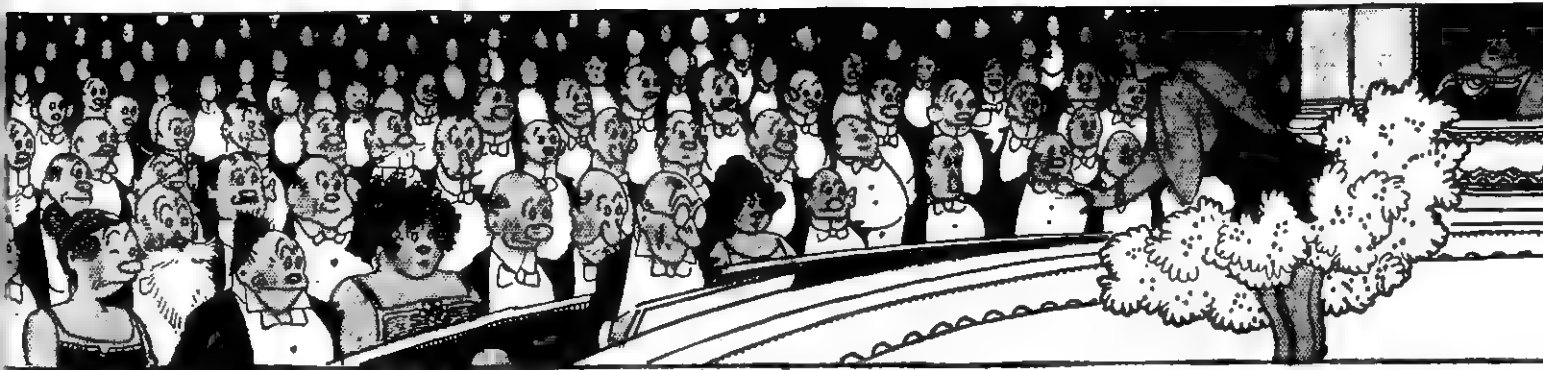


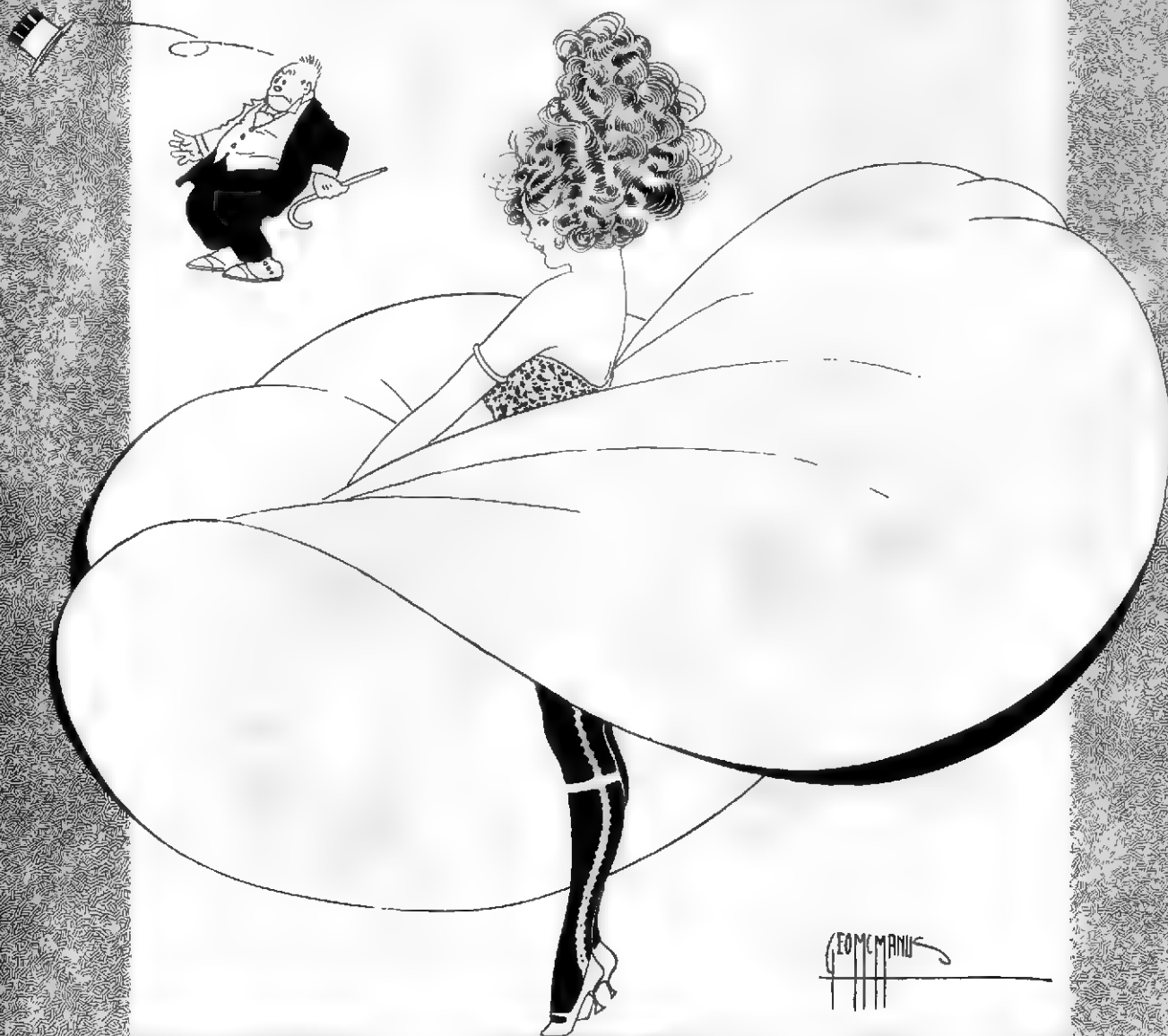


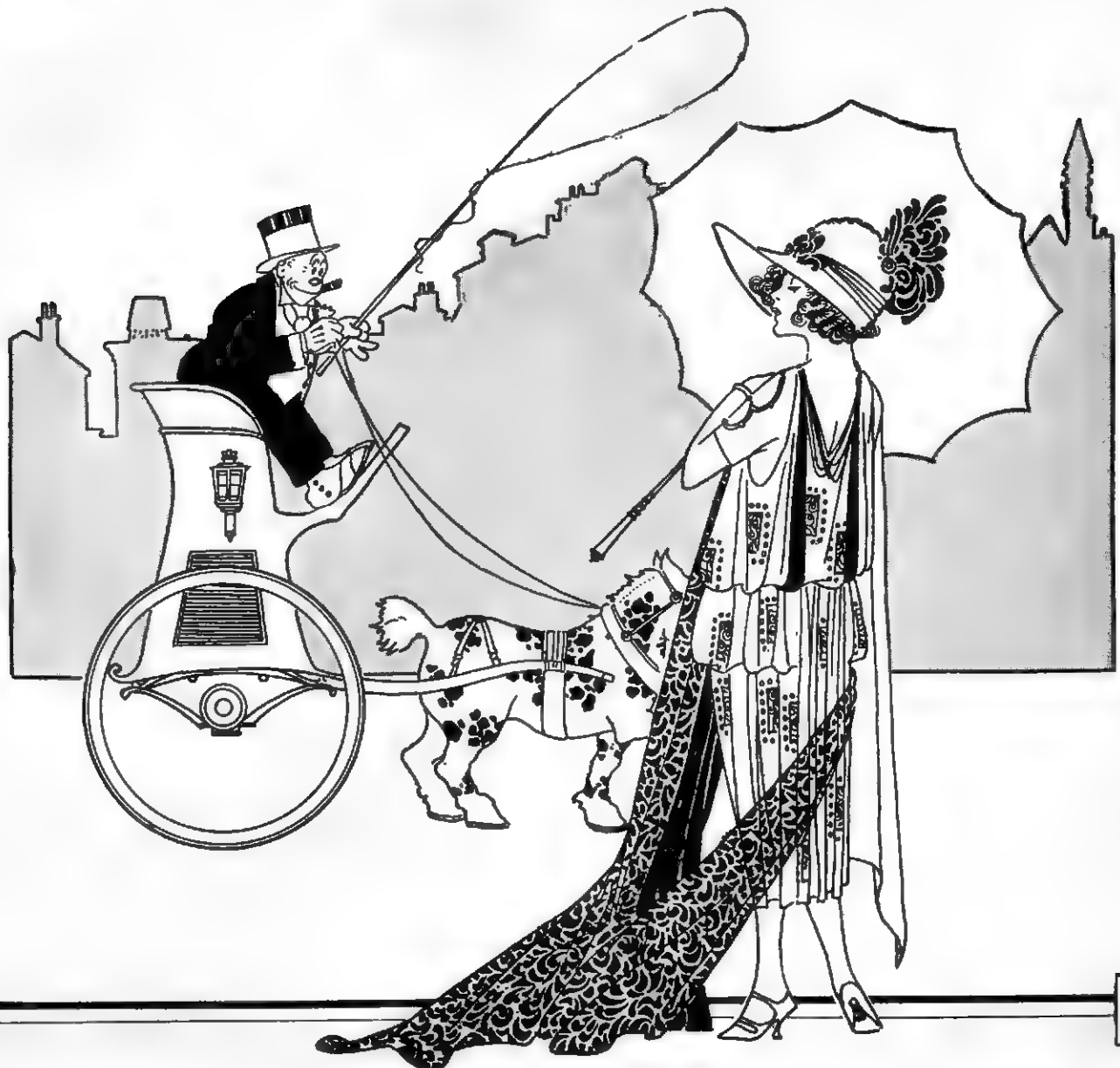




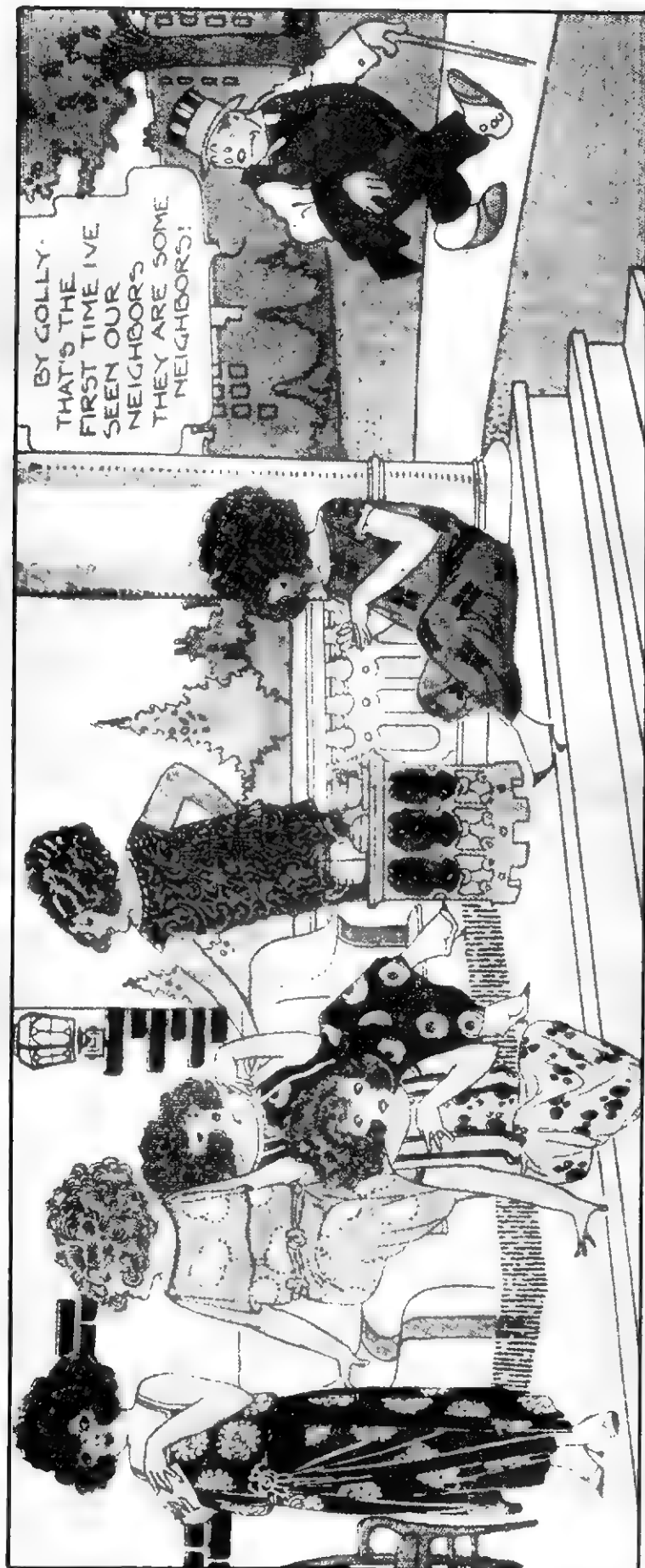


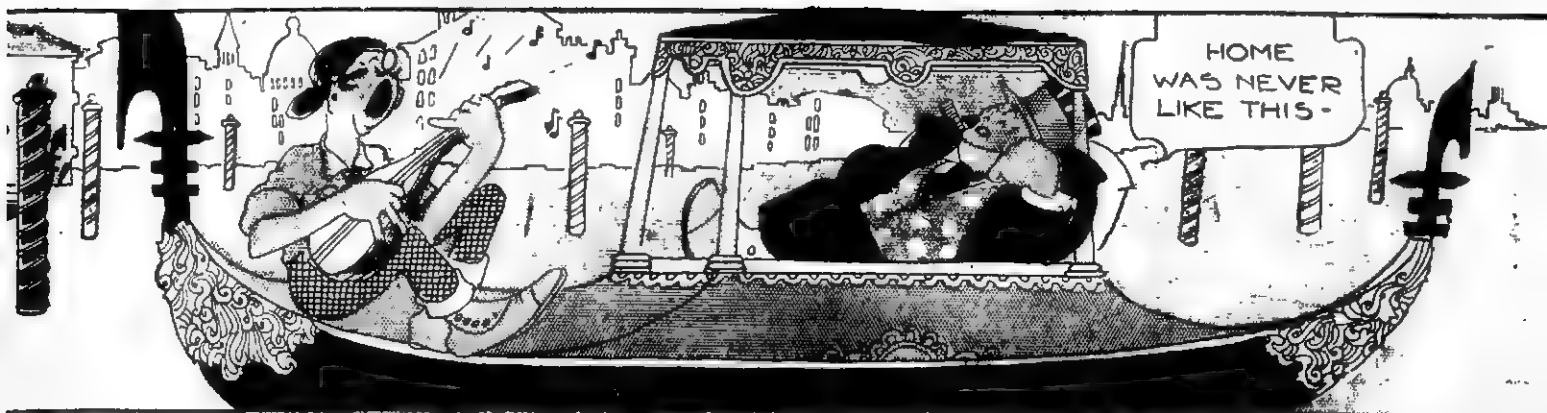












Playwright For Paper Actors

The Allen Saunders Autobiography

Chapter Eleven

The Art Of Plotting

After I have finished a lecture on comics, the chairman has invited questions from the audience, and one of the first invariably is: "Where and how do you get ideas for stories?" I usually reach for a laugh and reply: "They come easily if I replace the tobacco in my pipe with opium."

Disregarding this sad attempt at comedy, there is an answer which might be useful to all would-be story writers. And it is this—after you have succeeded, with some effort, in forcing yourself to take a chair facing a typewriter, roll in a sheet of scratch-paper and type one word: "The..."

Now, from a choice of thousands in your dictionary, type in a noun.

It will help if the noun gives you the profession, trade, or condition at the moment of the person—preferably familiar to you—as

"The bridegroom—

"The coroner—

"The plumber—

This combination of words can be extended profitably. My son, John, finds inspiration by preceding the words with "What if..."

"What if the bridegroom is already married?" Tell me why the guy is turning bigamist, and you have a plot; or

"What if the coroner is the culprit? Why did he commit the murder he is investigating?" I take a puff or two on that pipe (filled with tobacco, not opium) and offer you an opening paragraph:

Coroner Eustis Blair tried hard to listen and pretended to take notes as the young highway patrolman told him how a passing motorist had spotted the body under some bushes at the roadside. He was hearing nothing he didn't

already know, since he had fired the fatal bullet into his brother-in-law's head, less than an hour ago.

That doesn't stir the cockles of your creative mind? Okay. Here's your opening paragraph for the plumber story:

The plumber stared in horror at the red spot that had suddenly appeared on his grease-blotched hand. It had dripped from a misfit joint just above him, the reason for the panicky phone call he had received an hour before. A second drop followed it and the two merged in a viscous circle. Blood! And it was dripping as he knew from the washbowl in the powder-room off the first floor entrance hall. The housekeeper, when she made the service call, had been alarmed because she could hear a faucet running inside, but could not force the powder-room door in order to investigate. Something inside, apparently lying on the floor of the tiny room, seemed to be the obstruction.

Are you intrigued? Do you feel an urge to go on with the story?

If you refuse to commercialize the "First Aid for Mental Block," playing a solitaire game as you lie awake will either prevent insomnia or make it chronic, and incurable.

Shall I deal you another hand of cards? Good.

Let's go with:

"The..."

"The housemaid..."

"What if the housemaid (A) is going to have a baby by her married employer?" or (B) "...has found evidence that he is a thief?" or (C) "...is asked to testify in a divorce suit that she saw her employer beating his wife, her mistress?"

If you can't build an interesting plot out of one of the above, better take Mark Twain's advice and decide that the career in your future is in wood-chopping.



Playwright For Paper Actors

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Chapter Twelve

When The Readers Write

You sit in your Toledo, Ohio, studio, writing and rewriting copy which will appear in newspapers 12 weeks later, seldom reminding yourself that it may be read by, say, a biology professor in Detroit, a lifeguard in Miami, a gangster's girlfriend in Las Vegas, a rug-peddler in Istanbul, a teacher in Yugoslavia, an Australian rancher, and 50,000,000 others.

Primarily, you write for three readers: yourself, your artist partner and the composite figure of several hundred newspaper editors. But when you open the day's mail, containing some praise and frequent protests, you realize that the narrative arrow you have shot into the global air has found some unexpected targets.

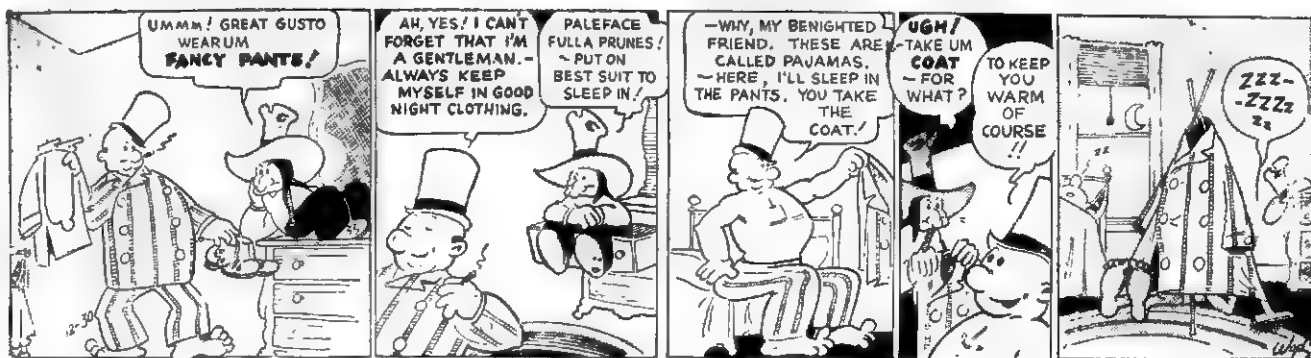
Reader mail generally falls into several definite categories. Leaving out requests for original drawings (from a rapidly growing number of ardent collectors) and questionnaires from

scholars doing theses on our branch of folk-culture, the letters concern any of several things: egregious blunders; approval or disapproval by representatives of commercial entities or special interest groups; pleas for the story then appearing to take a certain turn, or reflection of personal reactions which defies classification.

I realize why I almost flunked physics in high school when my ignorance about science is detected. In *Kerry Drake*, I had a crate fly off in a backward direction when a truck suddenly stopped. A physics teacher tartly informed me that momentum would carry it forward.

More humiliating was a letter from a juvenile reader. I had involved Steve Roper in the life of a young father of sextuplets. The lad was being pressured by a crafty promoter to sign an exploitation agreement. The villain and intended victim met in a





IN THE BEGINNING—Dailies from the first month of Allen Saunders' first syndicated strip. Originally drawn in collaboration with Elmer Woggon, the strip went through many title changes and thematic periods. In its trial period (over a year) with the syndicate, it was dubbed *The Great Gusto*. Then it was syndicated as *Big Chief Wahoo*. Later, as it switched from humor to adventure, it was titled after its new lead character, *Steve Roper*. In recent years it has been retitled *Steve Roper and Mike Nomad*...

snow-covered valley; the youth succumbed to wheedling and the promoter whipped out a fountain pen. As the father tried to sign the contract, he found the ink in the pen frozen. The promoter clamped it in his armpit and thawed it out. But before he could sign, Steve came over the hill, quickly made a snowball, and knocked the pen aside.

From a 10-year-old Oregon boy came a scornful piece of juvenile wisdom: "Are you only dumb! If it was so cold that it froze the ink, a snowball would not stick together."

Reference to the fact that a girl had been elected president of the school's Hi-Y brought student letters suggesting that this must have caused interesting problems in the locker-room!

And another youngster points out, referring to a *Roper* crime clue: "Enlarging a newspaper half-tone would only distort detail, not clarify it."

Occasionally my artist partners are caught nodding. In a *Mary Worth* sequence about a girl who had lost her left arm, our heroine appeared one day with the left arm missing in the first panel and the right one missing in the last panel.

Another artist drew a girl with three hands! When I asked him how it happened he gasped, turned red and explained that he had tried the hand in three positions in his pencil sketch and had forgotten to erase the extra one.

A *Roper* story was based on the problem of cattle rustling in Florida. In one panel, artist Bill Overgard showed a clandestine butchering operation in which the slain steer was depicted hanging head up. A dozen ranchers wrote to inform the city Boy artist that the animal should hang head down.

Show the wrong stamp on a letter, the wrong time on a tiny watchface, or turn a letter the wrong way on a window, viewed from the inside, and the artist is hit with a barrage of "Aha! Gotcha!" notes.

But some letter defy classification. For instance:

"As a Lesbian, I wish to thank you for your portrayal of two explicit 'dykes' in *Steve Roper*."

"Is *Mary Worth* a Plscs?" (My wife is. And, though Ken Ernst had never met her when he revamped Apple Mary, Lols looks startlingly like today's Mary. Maybe there is something to astrology!)

"I wonder if you have considered updating the conver-

sational pattern used in *Mary Worth*? Few Americans would say, 'I'll not' instead of 'I will not,' or 'I won't.'"

In a story which involved a school levy campaign, I used a slogan: "S.O.S. . . . SAVE OUR SCHOOLS!" And an obviously disenchanted boy sent a one-word rejoinder: "Why?"

There are pathetic and sometimes frightening letters from the mentally disturbed. I once received a series of letters from a man in a nearby city. He insisted, despite my repeated replies to the contrary, that a character in *Mary Worth* was really his sister. His letters become increasingly threatening and I stopped making any reply to them. At last came one secretly mailed by his wife. She warned me that he was talking ominously of coming to Toledo for a showdown. "Only by writing him that your comic strip character is actually his sister and apologizing can you keep him from trying to harm you," she wrote. I sent such a letter and never heard from him again.

Allen Saunders at work.



The most unforgettable piece of mail I ever received was an unsigned note on cheap ruled stationery. "Yesterday I felt so lonely, so hopeless, that I came home with the firm intention of taking the easy way out. But I opened the paper and in your story I found an answer I had been seeking. Thank you, *Mary Worth*, for saving my life."

It was a chilling reminder, as indeed is most reader mail, that writers of even such transitory fiction as comic strips have a responsibility which should not be taken lightly.



... Mike Nomad has increasingly taken a bigger role in the Steve Roper strip. Today William Overgard draws the strip; he took over from Woggon ghost Pete Hoffman (who later drew Jeff Cobb) in the early '50s. Also today, the writing is done by Allen Saunders' son John, whose first scripting credits were on the Dateline: Danger! strip with Alden McWilliams.

Playwright For Paper Actors

The Allen Saunders Autobiography

Chapter Thirteen

The Business Of Managing Strips

A writer of story strips may learn to his dismay that his fiction has unexpectedly proved to be fact, and that the long arm of coincidence can have a clenched fist at the end of it. He may find himself the defendant in a lawsuit, with the plaintiff asking for damages greater than a year's royalties.

The most frequent complaint is the use—unintentional of course—of some reader's name. Now characters, with rare exceptions, must have names, and it is virtually impossible to dream one up that isn't proudly borne by someone somewhere. The second row of keys on my typewriter reads: Qwertyuiop. I would hesitate to call an unsavory character James Qwertyuiop, for somewhere in the world, I am sure there exists a model of respectability named James Qwertyuiop... with a fee-hungry lawyer.

I once used an orchestra leader as a particularly vicious scoundrel in a crime story. Having just seen the play *Pal Joey*, I used Joe as his given name. Holding to the practice then popular of adding a Dickensian flavor to surnames, I came up with Joe Mandolino. The artist felt it took up too much space in balloons and asked for a shorter name, so I cut it to Joe Mandola. A week after the name appeared in print, I received a letter from a Texas lawyer telling me I was to be sued for \$25,000 "on behalf of my client, Mr. Joseph Mandola, leader of a hotel orchestra here." His threat was never carried out, but other incidents of the sort have occurred with disturbing frequency, bringing lawyers' letters demanding a published retraction... and, usually, \$25,000 to soothe the client's injured feelings.

A *Mary Worth* story dealt with a Washington, D.C. attorney whose wife was suing him for divorce. Soon came a letter on impressive stationery from a Washington, D.C. attorney with the identical name I had used for my character... same spelling, even the same middle initial. He informed me sternly that the strip, appearing in *The Washington Post* every day, was causing him great mental anguish and tarnishing his professional image, as his wife was in the process of suing him for divorce! He was, he wrote, considering an action against me for a million dollars. In his concluding paragraph, however, he stated that he would forego the pleasure of pauperizing me and my descendants for generations to come if I would send him an original drawing from the sequence... which you may be sure he received by return mail.

In recent years I have followed a rigid policy on surnames. Many towns in America were named after their founders, or individuals in some other way identified with the community. Thousands of such towns are listed in the national Zip Code directory. You can find an appropriate surname for a character of almost any nationality. And since I started using them I have breathed more easily. If a lawyer's letter comes in I can sign a deposition to the effect that my character was named for a

village in Ohio.

Even using the Zip Code book is not a goof-proof device, however. The plot of a *Mary Worth* episode dealt with a popular screen actor who, in his youth, had been a terrorist. Because his father had died of black-lung disease, the youth had sought revenge by bombing the mine-owner's property. A girl reporter for a sensational tabloid weekly learned his real name and boyhood address from an old high school annual and went to his hometown to seek information on his lurid and long-hidden past. Obviously, his true name and that of the mining town had to be fictitious.

Visualizing my own high school yearbook, I first called the village Thorntown, later changing that to Thornton. Just before mailing my roughs to Ken Ernst, I took the precaution of checking my trusty Zip Code book... and found a real Thornton, West Virginia listed!

Sweating over the narrow escape, I changed the village name to Taylorville, after consulting the Zip Code listing to make sure there was no Taylorville, West Virginia.

A few days after the sequence on the reporter's trip appeared, the syndicate comics editor phoned to relay a call from a Charleston, West Virginia newspaper editor. There was a Taylorville, West Virginia! And residents there were exceedingly curious as to why their town had been singled out for questionable notoriety.

I voiced the hope that the population included no citizen named Elkins, the actor's real name. "But it does!" I was informed. "One of Taylorville's oldest and most highly respected families proudly bears that name!"

I still sort my mail with trembling hands, dreading the day when a letter arrives from the Elkins' lawyers.

Most cartoonists have at some time had cause to wonder if they were gifted with extrasensory perception. Both Milton Caniff and Roy Crane, in aviation sequences of *Steve Canyon* and *Captain Easy*, have been called by the Pentagon and asked to explain how they could have shown accurate pictures of top-secret military aircraft still on carefully guarded federal drawingboards.

When Caniff was producing *Terry and the Pirates*, he had his hero flying supplies over the Himalayan Mountains to China. He dreamed up a radio station in the hills of China and called it "Happy Valley." One day he had a visit from an FBI agent. How, the man asked, did the artist find out about a secret radio station that did exist... and was called by the code name, "Happy Valley!"

We did a story in *Steve Roper* about a man being shot down on a golf course. While the sequence was running the father of the Lennon Sisters was gunned down by an unknown assailant on a golf course. I was relieved when weeks passed without the

charge being made that the strip had inspired that murder.

The most chilling coincidence in my own experience involved a *Mary Worth* episode in which a young, handsome, very rich senator with presidential aspirations was engaged to an airline stewardess, a Mexican-American girl.

It apparently was the first time in which a comic strip had used a Chicano girl as a heroine. From the national headquarters of the Mexican-American Anti-Defamation League came a warm letter of approval. And *Newsweek* carried a brief story about the sequence, in which the hero was referred to as "a Kennedy-esque young senator."

Driving home from New York on the Pennsylvania Turnpike the day of Neil Armstrong's moon-walk, I had my car radio on constantly to hear the running account of the landing. Suddenly the newscaster broke in with a special bulletin, telling how Senator Edward Kennedy had driven off a bridge near Chappaquiddick the night before, and a girl companion had drowned. Even in the brief account, questions were raised about the popular senator's failure to seek help at once.

I almost drove off the road!

"I'm in trouble," I told my wife and sister in the back seat. "In today's *Mary Worth* Sunday page, my young senator is being questioned by a police officer for leaving the scene of a fatal accident!"

Next morning I went to my studio early and carefully read the proofs on upcoming installments of the Senator Fincastle story. One strip contained material so shockingly pertinent to the Kennedy situation that I immediately drafted a complete revision and phoned artist Ken Ernst with the new copy. The editor of the syndicate, greatly disturbed, was on the wire minutes later. The substitute copy must be mailed, air mail special delivery, to all client papers as soon as Ken's drawing could be processed.

Seconds after he hung up, the long-distance calls started coming in... and continued all day. Papers from Seattle to Baltimore wanted to know if I had engaged psychic Jeanne Dixon as a consultant. A wire service sent out an interview to all its subscribers.

During the following weeks, friends mailed me clippings from all over the world. The *London Times* and *Paris Match* carried half-page accounts of the strange coincidence.

Although it would have been easy to prove by my photostats that the story of Senator Fincastle's ordeal was written months before the day of Chappaquiddick, it was a relief when weeks went by without a letter from the Kennedy attorneys.

Lawsuits are sometimes triggered by stories in which coincidence does not figure. Being a former college instructor, I am naturally against the flourishing commerce in written-to-order term papers on many campuses today. So, in a *Steve Roper* story, partners in a firm of instant-"A" traffickers were shown as mobsters, guilty even of murder.

Not too surprisingly, one such firm notified us that we were to be sued for damages... \$6,000,000 in damages! A decision on the case would have been a legal benchmark, but the suit never materialized. The protesters apparently decided that publicity on the trial might hurt business.

Any implication that a commercial product is not effective, or could be used in a harmful way, brings outraged protest and, with alarming frequency, a threat of legal redress.

You question, for example, the value of security mirrors in a supermarket; suggesting that, if the proprietor can see a shoplifter, the shoplifter can see him as well and be warned that he is being watched. An early mail brings the catalogue of a manufacturer of such mirrors. A sharply worded letter is enclosed. Maybe the company's competitors turn out two-way mirrors, it informs you, but their own product reflects only the rip-off artist.

In plotting a *Kerry Drake* episode, I once hit upon a murder method which seemed to defy detection. The killer planted a bag of solidified carbon-dioxide in a room with the intended victim. As the chemical volatilized it suffocated the victim with non-toxic, but deadly, fumes. More importantly, it left no trace whatsoever in the empty paper bag which the puzzled detective examined. No laboratory test could give the murder weapon away. As I laid out the sequence I rubbed my hands in triumphant glee. I had invented the perfect homicide. Use dry ice and you will never sit down in the electric chair or walk that last mile to the gas chamber.

When the sequence was published, the syndicate received a

letter. "You are evidently under the impression," it said, "that 'dry iced' is a generic term. It is not. It is a registered name, the exclusive property of the Liquid Carbonics Corporation of America." A final paragraph stated that the company's legal agents would go into action.

Fortunately, we were able to consult the country's leading authority on poison gases, the scientist who gave his name to Lewisite. He read the sequence and voiced the opinion that far less carbon-dioxide than shown would produce fatal results. "I have felt for some time," he added in his report, "that the public should be warned of this hazard."

Syndicate attorneys thereupon informed the protesting company that we might seek an injunction requiring all "dry ice" packages to carry such a warning. And the manufacturer was not heard from again.



Drake's Cakes—In addition to terse writing and clever plots, Allen Saunders filled *Kerry Drake* with weird villains and sexy femmes.

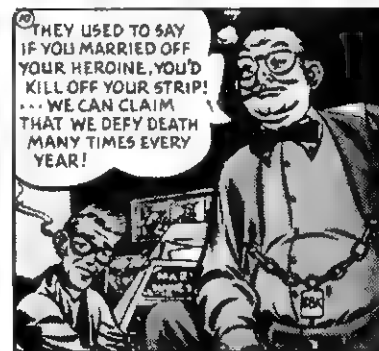
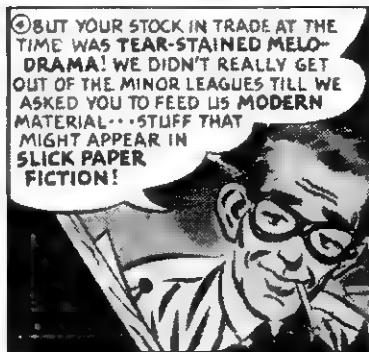
I realize that we have been exceedingly fortunate in never having had to pay for coincidences and blunders. And I sincerely regret the personal pain or loss of profit they may have caused. Sometimes I am tempted to follow the example of a pioneer Ohioan who named his off-spring One Stickney, Two Stickney, and so on. And, as for commercial products, perhaps I should look up the brisk young promoter who came to my hotel room in New York one afternoon.

The youth told me of a way to increase my income by mentioning, or showing, commercial products, rather than face lawsuits for doing that. "Mention Coor's beer, or merely show the distinctive Coca-Cola bottle in a drawing," he told me, "and I can get you a nice chunk of payola."

I shuddered. "Are you trying to put me out of business?" I snapped. Then I reminded him that a successful strip about Hollywood, *Olle of the Movies*, had been cancelled by most of its papers the day after a plug appeared for a Warner Brothers musical.

"Tell you what," he persisted. "You often include drawings of venetian blinds. Sign up with me and I can get you a nice bonus every time your artist shows one on a window instead of curtains."

He was still trying to corrupt me as I pushed him out the door.



A somewhat apocryphal, but charmingly revealing, page from Collier's Magazine in 1948. Mary Worth's creators, Allen Saunders and Ken Ernst, offer a peek into their studio, methods, and personal lives.



R.I.P.

VIP

Above the simple signature "Vip," the characters in Virgil Partch's single-panel cartoons weren't prone to kick off from natural causes. More likely, since Vip's logic defied all laws of time and space, death had an unnatural cause—as in his famous, "Boyl! If looks could kill, eh, Steve?" Steve, of course, can't hear, because he's stretched out flat on the sidewalk, still twitching as life drains away.

Throughout the '40s and '50s, in addition to his familiar bar-room boffs and desert doodlings, Vip drew dozens of gag panels depicting death, accidents and near-accidents in all sorts of settings: A man blithely picks mushrooms in a patch littered with three human skeletons. . . A woman says to her son, "Daddy wants to talk to you about leaving toys on the front walk," while her husband glares from his upside-down position balanced atop a single skate. . . A referee frantically rushes in to stop a basketball player who is dribbling another player's head. . . A woman camper, fixing breakfast, says, "Stop grumbling. It's just about done," while her husband flees from the bear leaning over her. . . Two horseback riders, embracing, never see the tree that comes between their galloping horses. . . A skyscraper signpainter works suspended in midair, while his partner, clinging to their collapsed scaffold, yells, "Well—don't just stand there." . . As two people and a canoe plummet over a waterfall, another couple, unperturbed, watches glumly, and the wife remarks, "Our vacation is coming to an end too, you know."

Death is as absurd as life, Partch seemed to say, and for a man who spent so much of his daily routine trying to find humor in death and accidents, the August 11, 1984 AP paragraphs, minus mirth, served as an ironic and grim tagline to Partch's 42-year career: "...California Highway Patrol reported Saturday. They said Mr. Partch, 67 years old, and his wife died in the accident on Interstate 5 north of Los Angeles. The couple lived in Laguna Beach. According to the highway patrol, Mr. Partch was a passenger in the car driven by his wife, 64, when it collided with a trailer being pulled by a slower-moving pickup truck also traveling northbound about 1:40 p.m. The pickup driver told the highway patrol he was traveling about 50 miles an hour when the crash occurred."

A few hours after Partch sat down in 1941 to draw his first batch of professional cartoons for Collier's Pearl Harbor was bombed, setting the tone and cueing the black humor that sud-

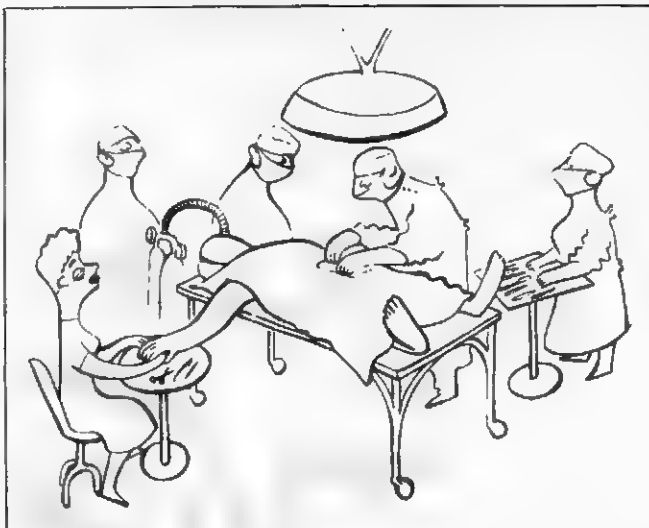
denly began to erupt from his jar of India ink. Through decades of freelancing, Partch programmed himself to think the unthinkable, to anticipate and visualize the unexpected. What wild cartoon imaginings passed through Vip's mind as he headed for a Northern California vacation on that August afternoon? Did Vip, in his last seconds on Interstate 5, see all the cartoons of his life flash before him? And did he, just before the moment of impact, remember his Collier's waterfall cartoon and think, "Our vacation is coming to and end too, you know?"

Vip Makes Waves

The New Yorker handed out the gold medals in the Cartoon Olympics; in *The Classic Cartoons* (1966), a collection of the best-known 300-plus "cartoons that people talk about," editors William Cole and Mike Thaler note that only "a handful of cartoonists have established reputations without *The New Yorker*," and they cite three such cartoonists—Shel Silverstein, Jules Feiffer, and Virgil Partch. In truth, Partch was a New Yorker contributor, albeit behind the scenes. "We have perhaps 70 or 80 regular artists, most of whom depend on other people for ideas," revealed Brendan Gill in *Here at The New Yorker*. "Every week, the magazine buys from 15 to 20 drawings or ideas for drawings." Partch was one of those "other people," anonymously whipping out gags for Peter Arno, Charles Addams, and others, simply because New Yorker editor Harold Ross couldn't stomach Vip's drawing style.

"Editors," remembered Partch, "weren't one hundred per cent for me. The late Harold Ross, after buying three of my cartoons, suddenly decided that the work was too gross. He pointed out that I drew characters with lips, nostrils and teeth showing. I thought of pointing out to him that most of us are cursed with these extras but decided at the last moment to sulk instead. Now that I look at my drawing from that period, I agree with him." No doubt Ross was equally disturbed by Vip's raw, punk energy and his images of blatant sexuality—as in Partch's drawing of the sex-obsessed Monahan who has crashed

by Bhub Stewart



through six doors to reach a woman who says, "Please, Mr. Monahan, don't make me hate you." What Ross probably perceived as lowbrow and grotesque in Partch's work was the very element that kept his cartoons on the top of the heap over at *True*, the *Man's Magazine*.

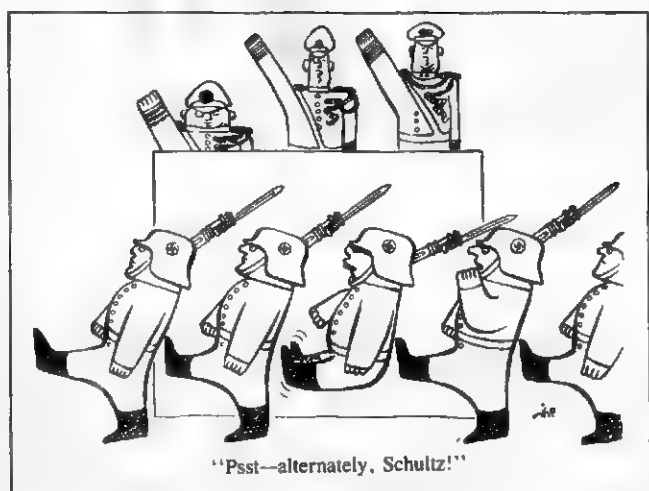
In volumes shelved alongside *New Yorker* Albums of cartoons, one can sometimes find Abner Dean's famed "naked people"—acceptable back then because they cavorted without a hint of eroticism. Vip, however, always wanted to see what the boys in the back room would have: Maybe this came from hanging out with sailors when he was grade school age. He was born October 17, 1916 on the famed seal-breeding island of St. Paul, Alaska, one of the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, where his father, Paul C. Partch, a chief petty officer in the United States Navy, was stationed. The cartoonist once described his father as "an oil painter, etcher, dabbler in music and literature—and a tournament chess player." Paul Partch was in charge of naval radio stations around Sitka, Dutch Harbor and Kodiak where young Virg received an informal early education from his father and other Navy men. Since his father was periodically stationed, Vip had little opportunity to make lasting friendships; with humor he could establish immediate contact. "I was always the new boy who was a stranger, ripe for getting beat up," he told *Cleveland Plain Dealer* editor Phil Porter. "I wasn't big enough to fight, so I began to tell jokes to make the other kids laugh, so they wouldn't slug me. By the time my father put in his 20 years in the Navy and retired, I was the fastest kid in school with a one-liner."

In 1925 the Partch family relocated at Puget Sound and then moved down the coast to San Francisco and San Diego, where, in 1926, ten-year-old Virgil won a newspaper's "Draw Jiggs" competition. Around this same time, he also acquired the nickname "Vip." "In school," he explained in 1967, "we were required to put our initials above our blackboard work. My middle name is Franklin, but they way I do a capital F it comes out a capital I, and my problems were so ludicrous that they became known as 'Vip's Follies'."

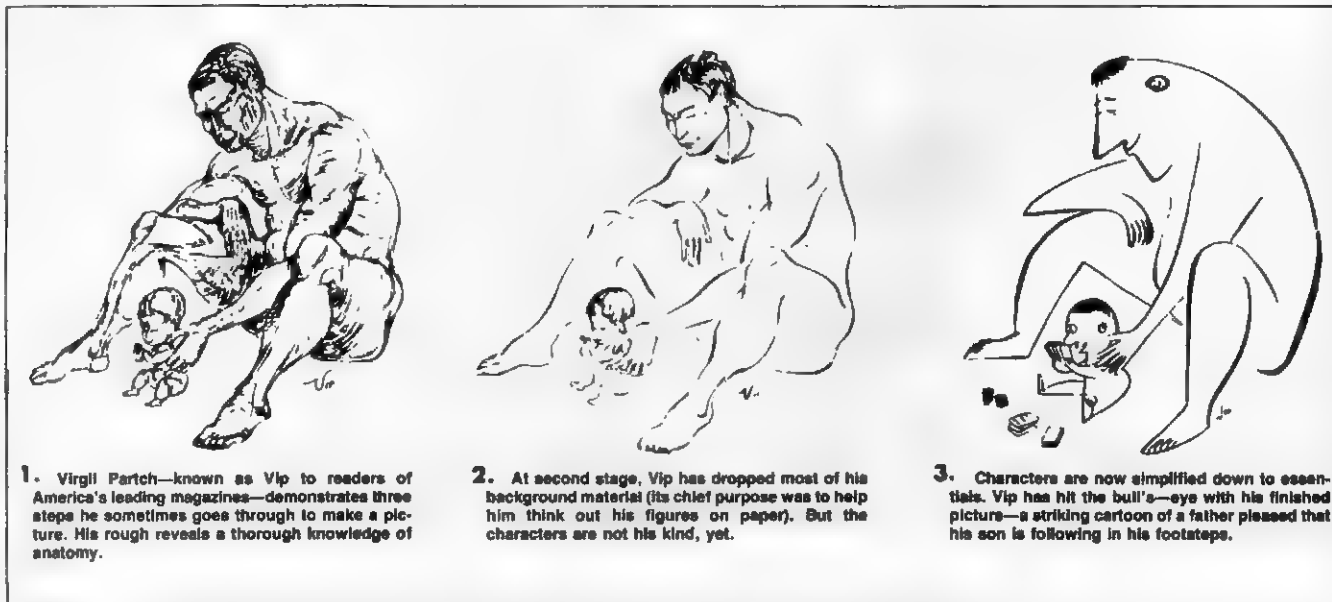
Partch in the Desert

When his younger brother and his mother, Anna Pavloff Partch, both contracted tuberculosis, the family's nautical life came to an end. In 1930 they jumped ship and headed for the health resort area of Tucson, Arizona, where Vip attended Tucson High School and Paul Partch served up family meals inspired by whatever he happened to be reading. If, for instance, he read a volume on Roman history, *Newseek* later reported, "the family dined on tough fibered meats, rabbits, and a concoction made of rabbits' eyes. Vip claimed that chicken feed was a regular on the breakfast menu. At any rate, the patients recovered."

Great Moments in Career Guidance: In 1933 Vip's high school art teacher, Mrs. Ostrander, took him just outside Tucson for an



Below: In *Design* magazine, Vip later refuted the suggestion of the academic structuring of his artwork: "I do not, for each picture I draw, make an anatomical sketch as I did here."



introduction to the man known as the "dean of American editorial cartooning," John Tinney McCutcheon (1870-1949). Vip found McCutcheon "so goddam nice, rich and complimentary, that I took up cartooning as a career instead of managing massage parlors or acting." At the University of Arizona, in Tucson, Vip majored in art, played football and contributed to the campus humor magazine, *Arizona Kitty Kat*. Vip's first widespread recognition as a cartoonist came after his offbeat (and off-color) *Kitty Kat* drawing of an admiral and a sailor caught on in magazine reprints and as a comic postcard (which was still being printed and distributed during WWII). *Newsweek* tracked this cartoon to "such widely separate places as a saloon in Panama and a disorderly house in Seattle."

One year at college was enough for Vip. He dropped out, deserted the desert for LA's Chouinard Art Institute and, six months later, in December 1937, began working as an office boy at the Walt Disney Studios. After marrying artist-sculptor Helen Marie Aldridge in May 1938, he began to work his way up the rungs of the Disney ladder to the position of assistant animator and a weekly paycheck of \$35. (A Disney week was often five-and-a-half days.) In 1939 Virgil and Helen had a son, Nicholas, who later found himself in the company of a brother, Peter, and sister, Anna.

Day of Infamy

In one account Partch's magazine cartoon career began with *The New Yorker*: "I made my first sale for \$50 to *The New Yorker*. That really knocked me out. Imagine getting more in one day for one cartoon than I was making in a week for Disney!" In the other version it happened at *Collier's*: "My freelance career started in 1941 when I met Dick Shaw in a bar near the Disney Studios in Burbank. Shaw was a well established freelancer selling regularly to the *Post*, *Collier's* and *Liberty*. Dick wanted to get into animation; I wanted to get into the freelance field but was rather dubious as to my ability to succeed. Somehow the switch was made when Shaw, without my knowledge, sent a flock of my doodlings to the late Gurney Williams, then humor editor of *Collier's*. Gurney bought one, and I was hooked forever. On the strength of one magazine sale I devoted the following Sunday to turning out my first planned magazine batch of roughs. I well remember that particular Sunday. My beat-up peanut radio was playing—I've got to have noise when I work—and suddenly the music was interrupted by news of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor."

When Vip surfaced in *Collier's* (February 14, 1942) with his captionless drawing of a hospital patient receiving surgery and a manicure, he was in good company; *Collier's* cartoonist roster of the early '40s was a pantheon of the finest freelancers in the business—George Price, Charles Addams, Crockett Johnson (who drew his untitled "Little Man with the Eyes" strip for *Collier's* before creating *Barnaby* for *PM*), John Ruge, Garrett Price, Clifford Irving's father Jay Irving (who did the weekly "Collier's Cops" feature), Larry Reynolds, George Wolfe, Polish refugee Arthur Szyk (who attacked the Nazis on both covers and interiors), Chon Day, Carl Rose, Reamer Keller, cover illustrator Vernon Grant (of Rice Krispies fame), Gardner Rea, Otto Soglow, and William Steig.

His Eye Is On the Darrow

Look up "VIP" in dictionaries of acronyms, and you'll find Virgil Partch cited alongside "Very Important Person" and "Very Important Passenger." Wentworth and Flexner's *Dictionary of American Slang* dates the "Very Important Person" usage back to WWII—the same period that cartoon editor Gurney Williams saw Partch's nickname as an appropriately nutty and eye-catching signature device. "I tried to use another signature on my first cartoon," recalled Partch. "Inspired by Whitney Darrow Jr., I decided that V. Franklin Partch II would look pretty jazzy. Gurney Williams said no." Partch's earliest *Collier's* cartoons carried no signature, only a typeset "Virgil Partch," suggesting that Williams may have deleted the full-name signature, perhaps because he saw it as a conspicuous distraction from the simplicity of Partch's captionless art.

Vip's "Onions," a nine-picture progression showing the influence of his four years in animation, appeared in the March 21, 1942 *Collier's*. He was on his way. Vip had no immediate plans to "kiss that regular weekly \$47.50 Mickey Mouse check good-bye," but the decision wasn't his. Because he had participated in the 1941 Disney strike, Partch was fired in 1942, supporting his wife and son for six weeks on unemployment checks. *Time*,



Onions



"Sir, let me have her. I'll make a soldier out of her."

wasn't everyone's piece of cake. There was a pretty large segment of the public who thought my work was atrocious."

A *Time* interviewer was told, "You are sitting before a man utterly devoid of ambition," so *Time* termed Partch a "reluctant success" when the magazine reviewed his first book, *It's Hot in Here* (McBride, 1944), an 80-page collection of his *Collier's* cartoons. *Collier's* staffer Kyle Crichton contributed the book's introduction, noting that some *Collier's* readers had "hinted that Partch might be posing as a symbol for the Death of Civilization, which is a laugh. Partch is a symbol of nothing but dementia. The future historian who unearths his work and tries to give it meaning will simply be making a fool of himself. We hardly needed Partch as a signpost of disintegration at a time when the murdered bodies of German victims were still being dug out of the pits of Kiev. . . . As an indication of what civilization is in these troubled times, his work is irrelevant, immaterial and a damned lie. There never was anybody like the individuals of a Partch cartoon except Partch himself. This is the best break the world has had recently."

Arkham House publisher August Derleth (a comics buff who occasionally wrote material for cartoonist Clare Victor "Dwig" Dwiggins) praised *It's Hot in Here* in the *Chicago Sun's Book Week*: "While some of Partch's characters are potential inmates of padded cells, there is no psychiatry in Partch's work itself. His drawings are completely his own, usually grotesquely but strikingly distorted, most often entirely wacky, now and then filled with hilarious satire, social, military and what have you. His cartoons are to be looked at and enjoyed, whatever your mood, not to be probed and examined for deep hidden meanings."

Isabelle Mallet, reviewing the book in the *New York Times*, patriotically viewed Vip as part of the homefront war effort: "Partch must be swallowed whole, or left severely alone. The fact that we can swallow him at all and live to digest Steig is our national secret weapon. Our own brand of strength-through-joy training builds up a healthy national resistance to shock, which means despair to our enemies—and to some of our allies too."

From 1A to 4E Ackerman

Instead of following in the wake of his Navy father, Vip took a different tack; he was drafted into the Army in September 1944, cutting short his plans to move to the East Coast. "About the time I became 1A in the draft I had the opportunity to go to New York to work. But I knew I'd soon be in the Army, and I didn't want the wife and kids to be stuck in New York." His initial induction brought him in contact with Forrest J. Ackerman, later famed as the editor of *Famous Monsters of Filmland* but then an editor of an army camp newsletter, the *Fort MacArthur Bulletin*, along with cartoonist Will Gould (Red Barry). As Forry recalls, it was probably Gould who spotted Partch's name on a list of inductees and corralled him as a *Bulletin* cartoonist for several months, drawing caricatures of base brass for the "Nice



"Would you mind moving your things, Madame?"

PLANET STORIES 20¢

STRANGE ADVENTURES ON OTHER WORLDS
THE UNIVERSE OF FUTURE CENSORS—

FAN

"THE BIG DIPPER"
A STIRRING NAVAL

A BEE JACKIT NOVELTY—

"THE SKY BLUE PINK EXOZYDOPHYLANTHOSON"

NOV 44 - NOV 15

In 1944-1945, Partch contributed to science fiction fanzines. This parody of *Planet Stories* appeared as the front cover of Walter J. Daugherty's *Fan* (November 1944).

Guys" feature. When Ackerman supplied the photos for Vip's use in creating the caricatures, he slipped in several of science fiction fans—which explains how Vip became, in 1944-45, a contributor to fanzines. Through Ackerman, fan editor Walter J. Daugherty acquired Vip caricatures of himself, F.T. Laney, Mel Brown, Frank Robinson, and E.E. Evans for the first issue of *Daugherty's Fan* (November 1944), along with a Vip parody of *Planet Stories* for *Fan's* first cover. Under the heading "Fan Artists," more Vip caricatures (Alva Rogers, Jack Weidenbeck) appeared in *Fan* #6 (February 1946).

Vip was then sent on to Fort Ord for basic training. "Just as I'd built up a good head of steam with magazines and advertising, had published my first book, signed to illustrate Bugs Baer's Sunday spread, turned down the job of editorial cartoonist for Marshall Field's long gone *PM* newspaper of Brooklyn, and turned down a contract with King Features for a daily panel (why, I can't remember), the war caught up with me. I wound up in the infantry, where cartooning is out, but after one year of hoofing it I was transferred to Special Services, 6th Army. I ended up on 'Vinegar' Joe Stilwell's Fort Ord Panorama, a weekly paper with a circulation of 60,000—we mailed them all over the world."

History repeated itself; as at Fort MacArthur, once again his name was recognized, as he explained to AP's Hubbard Keavy: "Orders had been cut to ship me to wherever the hell the action in the Pacific was. But a guy saw my name on the shipping list, and he called Mrs. General Stilwell and said, 'We have a cartoonist. D'ya think the General would like to have him on *Panorama*?' My orders changed, and I was on the staff of *Panorama*—as cartoonist, business manager, circulation director and art director. The last job was a cinch—you cut out pictures and paste them up. I lived off the base and had a beautiful blonde lady chauffeur. A wonderful two years as an infantryman! I put in all of an hour a day."

Ord Fellows Hall

With his free time he returned to freelancing. "It was possible for me to 'moonlight,' and I started selling to magazines again.

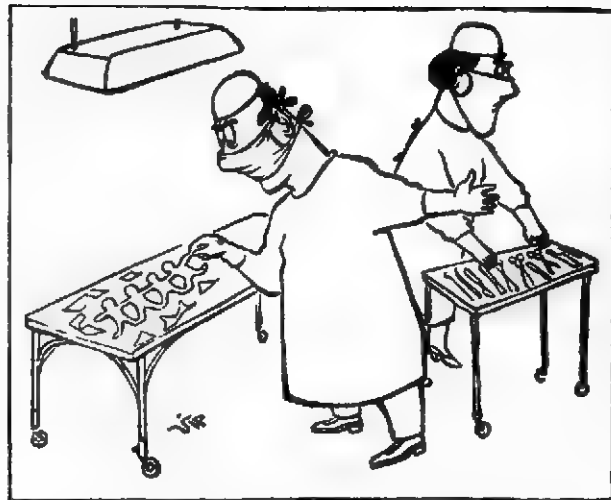
Newsweek, and *Current Biography* all later generated copy about Vip's \$18 a week unemployment, but none noted that this figure was equivalent to the salaries some artists were then being paid at the other, non-Disney, studios.

Disney told his daughter, "I didn't have to fire anybody to get rid of the chip-on-the-shoulder boys and the world-owes-me-a-living lads. An elimination process took place I couldn't have forced if I'd wanted to. Our organization sifted down to the steady dependable people. The others have gone." Richard Schickel, in *The Disney Version*, dismissed Disney's statement as "utter nonsense":

A large percentage of his most independent and creative artists left him after the strike. Not all of them did so in overt protest. Some were drafted away from him after the U.S. entrance into the war; some merely drifted away in search of a better atmosphere in which to exercise their talents. Among them were the group who formed the nucleus of UPA, the little studio that wrested leadership in the animation field from Disney at the end of the war; among them, too, were such gifted cartoonists as Walt Kelly, Sam Cobean and Virgil Partch. It is impossible to say if any or all of them might have stayed on with Disney if the climate of the studio had been more salubrious, but it is clear that the strike irreparably widened a breach that had begun to open long before the picket lines went up.

Partch's longtime friend, cartoonist Dick Olden, recalled that Vip "drove Disney crazy. He'd draw people with six or seven or 15 fingers all the time." Despite the 1941-42 Disney turmoil, Patch later expressed only a fond nostalgia for the Disney organization; his reminiscence (in the Spring 1967 *World of Comic Art*) reads as though he had departed from Burbank with a yearbook and a diploma:

Looking back on old Disney Studio days, I feel the sort of warmth that an old grad feels for his college days. One has the tendency to forget 'chicken guano' and recall the good times only. Walt Disney had surrounded himself with the best young artists he could find in this country and abroad. Most of us were art school products with academic backgrounds. Simply being in this group was exhilarating. There's something downright contagious about talent. It rubs off on you. We talked art and ideas incessantly, and most of us continued our art studies in the free school which Walt had set up with some of the finest instructors he could find. There was no cartooning in this school. A few of my pals from those Disney days were Walt Kelly (Pogo); Roy Williams, who was quite hot with *The New Yorker* and many other publications before Walt talked him into devoting full time to studio publicity; Claude Smith, who signs his work 'Claude' in most domestic magazines and in *Punch*; Hank Ketcham (Dennis the Menace); Don Tobin (The Little Woman); the late Bill De La Torre (Little Pedro); Eldon Dedini of *The New Yorker*,



Playboy, Look; George Baker (Sad Sack); Hank Syverson of *Post* and other magazines; Pete Hansen and others. A few went straight: John McDermott, moulemaker, author and illustrator; Frank Tashlin, author and director of many top box office movies; David Swift, creator of TV's Mr. Peepers... Walt managed to struggle along without us and did rather well.

Woody Woodpecker had just attained stardom in 1941-42, enabling Vip to secure a slot in the Walter Lantz bullpen. "Lantz was a great boss to work for. He'd shout from well down the hall to our bullpen that he was about to enter and that it might be less embarrassing for all hands if we'd wake up and look busy, which we all did. While working for Lantz in 1942, the late Sam Cobean, whom I'd known at Disney's, came to work with me. Sam and I would complete our week's assignment in eight hours quite easily and would devote the rest of the week to gag cartoons. I was selling magazines pretty well during this period and tried to talk Sam into trying his hand in the freelance field, but he wouldn't go along with it. Later, however, while in the signal corps with Charley Addams, Charley talked him into submitting to *The New Yorker*. Within a couple of years Sam was to become the hottest man on the payroll."

Stucco Inside Hollywood with the Balboa Blues Again

By 1943, living in a green stucco house in North Hollywood, Vip was averaging \$125 a week selling to *This Week*, *PM*, and *The Saturday Evening Post*. Bennett Cerf included several Viptoons in his *Pocket Book of Cartoons* (Pocket Books #233, 1943), noting, "Collier's has uncovered a new artist named Virgil Partch whose work delights me. He belongs right up there with the Arnos, Thurbers, Hokinsons. Prices and other headlines," while *Newsweek* compared Vip to Picasso: "The line drawings of Partch's angular and rectangular characters have something in common with the tragic figures of Picasso's Spanish War *Guernica*, and, paradoxically, with the amiably insane people of Ensign Saul Steinberg's subtle cartoons in pantomime."

In the August 21, 1943 *Collier's* Gurney Williams wrote, "Collier's bought the first of Partch's gags on January 8, 1942, has stamped an okay on the best he has turned out since, and has patiently answered letters from readers demanding to know if Mr. Partch is unhinged and are we in our right minds. Our patience has been rewarded; we seldom hear any complaints these days." Certainly Partch wasn't complaining. Along with his regular freelance markets, he added advertising contracts (Wheaties, Squirt drink mix). After only a year-and-a-half of gag cartooning, Partch was hot, but he dismissed his success as nothing more than a matter of timing: "I have a feeling that my offbeat, grotesque cartoons succeeded as well as they did during the early '40s because of the war and the accompanying fears, unrest and uncertainty. The resulting swing to nutty humor was a sort of safety valve for the tensions which are the symptoms of such a period. If I had to start from scratch in another period, such as peacetime, I doubt if I could expect the same success with public and editors. Of course, my stuff



"Best let your book go for a minute, Ed. Here's another birthday job."



This certainly helped my corporal's pay. Now I could hang out at Carmel's spiffy cocktail lounge right along with the colonels to the end of the month. Privates last about three days after receiving their pay, corporals about five days, buck sergeants a week." He satirized Army life in his popular cartoon series, *Vip's War*, often receiving requests from generals for originals.

When another collection, *Water on the Brain* (McBride, 1945), appeared, Lisle Bell (*Weekly Book Review*) found the 127 pages "funny if you enjoy remembering your nightmares," while *Kirkus* commented, "Full page and strip series, these, because of outlandish characters, are not everyone's idea of humor, but the ideas are there for some good laughs." *New York Times* critic Charles Poore described *Water on the Brain* as "screwy enough to compete with the day's news," but obviously words failed the *Springfield Republican's* reviewer: "Vip's people, most of whom look like missing links, are practically indescribable, and his humor has to be seen to be appreciated."

By 1946 he was still in uniform. But then, as Partch put it, "Uncle Sam saw fit to let me loose. I'd become attached to the Carmel-by-the-Sea area, which is only a hop, step and jump from Fort Ord, so I decided to settle there with my wife and young son." At that time the only other cartoonist living in the area was Jimmy Hatlo (*They'll Do It Every Time*), but then Vip talked Hank Ketcham into moving there from Westport, Connecticut. Over the next two decades the Monterey peninsula became a haven for cartoonists—*Playboy's* Eldon Dedini, Frank O'Neal (*Short Ribs*), Gus Arriola (*Gordo*), and Bob Barnes (*The Better Half*).

The fourth issue of *Cartoon Digest* (May 1946), "The Best in American Cartooning," reprinted a *Collier's* cartoon by Vip and commented, "The man who draws in the United States today does so with a freedom and an abandon which can't be duplicated anywhere else in the world. . . . Partch's drawing of a surgeon calling for instruments in order to cut out paper dolls is hugely funny—if you're an American. Probably very few other peoples would appreciate this type of humor."

Saloon and drinking cartoons stacked up during these years as Vip did on-location research. "When I first started freelancing for magazines after a hitch with Disney and the Army, I visited the only bar in Balboa Island," he told Hubbard Keavy. "I'd order a drink, and on the receipt I'd sketch a saleable cartoon. If it looked good, I'd have another drink and get another receipt and draw another idea. The next day, when my head was clear, I'd see what I had. You hear a lot of talk in bars, more than you'd hear in a public library. A bar is a good idea place."

Eastward Ho!

"The post-war freelance markets were very good to me, and I decided to pay my first visit to New York City, the source of my

bread. Six years had elapsed since selling my first cartoon, and I'd never met Gurney Williams or the other editors who had been so kind to me. The trip was sort of a pilgrimage. Wednesday in Manhattan is the traditional marketing day for cartoonists. They train in from Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and from all over New York state, and troop from magazine to magazine showing their wares. Of course, there's a long, wet lunch break at the Pen and Pencil restaurant or some such place; then back to the rat race. I didn't have a batch to show but simply wanted to meet the editors and the boys whose work I'd been seeing for years. Funny thing, I was surprised to see how old most of the cartoonists were. Now when I visit New York, I'm surprised to see how disgustingly young they are."

During the '50s *Vip*toons appeared regularly in *True*, *Ballyhoo*, *Collier's* and many other magazines. He nailed down more advertising assignments, and an alliance with Duell, Sloan and Pearce/Little, Brown led to a full shelf of *Vip* books. His bestselling *Bottle Fatigue* ("Vip's Report on Alcohol and Man"), published in 1950, uncorked 60 new drawings, plus an intro by *True* cartoon editor Clyde Carley, who wrote, "For the first time in his life Vip has worked entirely on his own, without the benefit of screening and heckling which are the lot of artists working for the magazines and the agencies." Apparently intoxicated by this situation, Vip stirred a potent brew of bizarre gag cartoons illustrating the effects of drinking, adding a twist of twisted hallucinatory drawings verging on *dellrium tremens* visions. A saloon society classic, *Bottle Fatigue* sold 94,312 copies by the end of the decade. Adding to Vip's rep—as a researcher who "left no glass unturned," as Carley phrased it, was *Bar Guide* (Gold Medal #135, 1950), written by Ted Shane with interior illustrations and a full-color cover by Vip. Vip also opened up new channels of cartoon marketing when his cartoons were among the first to be printed on cocktail napkins.

Here We Go Again (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1951) carried this back cover blurb: "Having alerted himself to the news that once again some millions of his (younger) fellow citizens are about to go through the unforgettable process of Army processing, Ex-Corporal (A.U.S.) Vip felt called upon [and, indeed, was called upon by his publishers] to prepare a convenient, inexpensive, unorthodox handbook for the new GIs."

Cartoon Laughs from True (Gold Medal #249, 1952), a "pick of the best" by Carley, with a full-color *Vip* cover fronting work by Vip, his friends Claude Smith, Dedini, Tobin, Ketcham, Cobean and many others, was followed by *Cartoon Fun from True* (Gold Medal #383) two years later. Two more Duell, Sloan and Pearce titles, *The Wild, Wild Women* (1951) and *Man—the Beast* (1953) were later combined into a 25¢ mass-market paperback, *Man the Beast and the Wild, Wild Women* (Dell #843, 1955), putting Vip on display in small towns where the hardbacks had never been seen. At the same time Gold Medal published *Funny Cartoons by Vip* (#445, 1955). Paperbacks continued to Partch the countryside with the Norman Lockridge/*Vip Sex Without Tears* (Crest #141, 1956) and *Crazy Cartoons by Vip* (Crest #155, 1956).

In the intro to Partch's *The Dead Game Sportsmen* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce) (previously unpublished cartoons about hunters and fishermen) Gurney Williams offered a slightly different version of Dick Shaw's role in launching Vip's ship: "Back in 1942 Shaw beat Virgil over the head at increasingly frequent intervals until our subject mailed four drawings to my office. Not being a moronic baboon at the time, I bought all four. The



VIP...Turning the Tables

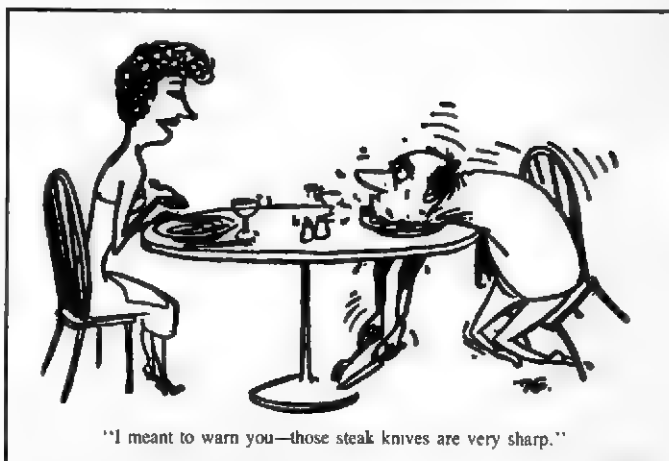
Why was Virgil Partch haunted by this image of table-gnawing? Throughout his career it appeared in several variations of both art and caption. Vip's early style can be seen in "Let me know if he bothers you, ma'am," originally drawn for *Collier's* and reprinted shortly after in Bennet Cerf's *The Pocket Book of Cartoons* (1943). A decade later, the line changed to "Let me know if he annoys you, Miss." in Partch's collection *Man—the Beast* (1953), featuring a much more aggressive table-eater. Cartoonist *PROfiles* ran yet another "Let me know if he annoys you" in its September 1976 issue. In *Drink and Be Merry* (1959) a character tries to eat normally but winds up in the same position as the table-eaters. Finally, Vip eliminated all traces of lustful table-eating, in favor of just plain table-eating, when he regurgitated the concept for a page in his 1975 children's book, *Vip Quilps*.



"Let me know if he annoys you."

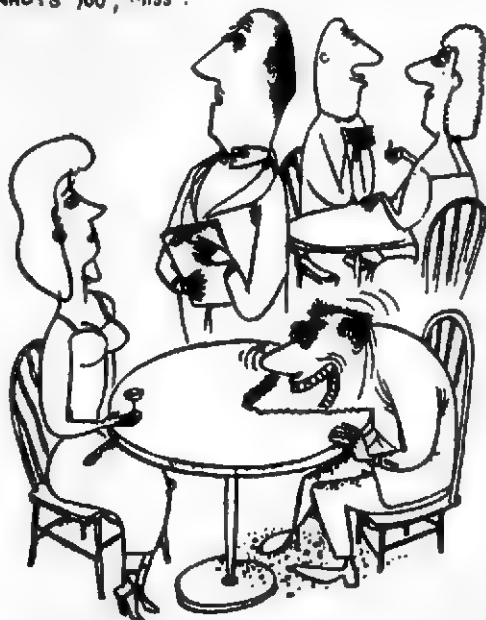


"Let me know if he bothers you, ma'am."



"I meant to warn you—those steak knives are very sharp."

"LET ME KNOW IF HE
ANNOYS YOU, MISS."



following week I received more Partch drawings (Shaw was still in there pitching), and I bought them because they were sensational."

The Ragged Edge

The 1955 *Hanging Way Over* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce), 70 cartoons from 1942-55 portraying "man on the ragged edge," was something of a themeless grabbag, but this didn't make the collection any less funny. A back cover biographical squib revealed that Vip "plays hot jazz—enjoys playing with Ajax, his great Dane, who thinks he's a lap dog—and unlike many cartoonists, invents his own gags."

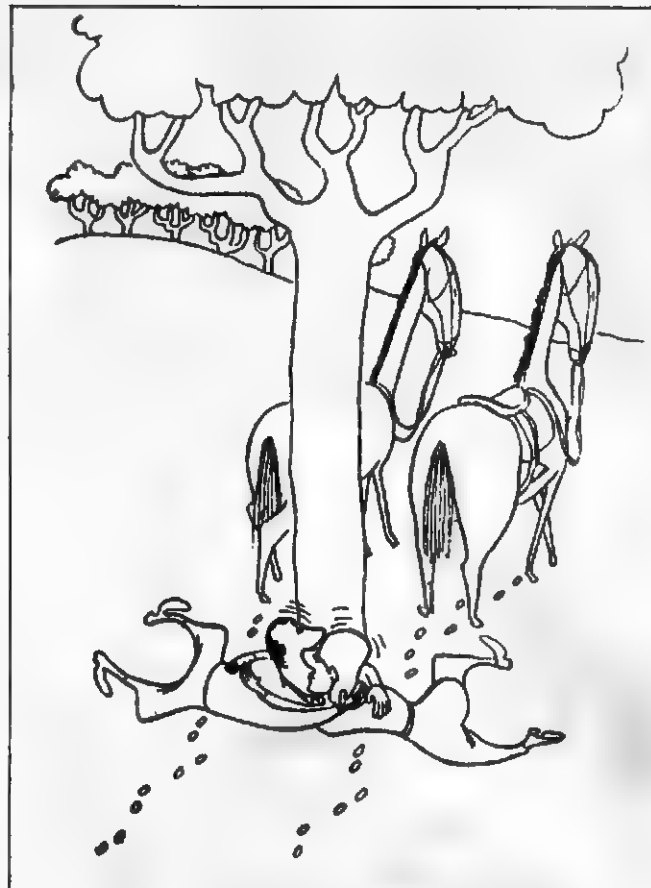
Yes. But how did he invent those outrageous gags, strikingly different from the output of other cartoonists? The Vip trade secrets were revealed when he became a mid-'50s contributor to the Famous Artists School Cartoon course. "While visiting Manhattan several years ago, Al Dorne, the late great illustrator, got in touch with me and offered me a chance to join Al Capp, Whitney Darrow Jr., Milt Caniff, Dick Cavalli, Willard Mullin, Rube Goldberg, Harry Haenigsen, and Barney Tobey in developing a cartoon course for the Famous Artists School in Westport, Connecticut. Naturally, I snapped at the opportunity and haven't regretted it one bit." Gurney Williams supervised the textbook section on magazine cartooning, and Famous Artists students were introduced to Vip in the Spring and Summer 1956 issues of *Famous Artists Magazine*. For the Cartoon Course Vip authored an instructional essay which was later excerpted by *Design* magazine under the head, "Cartoonist At Work." Many creators mock or evade the cliché question, "Where do you get your crazy ideas?"—but Vip, who always took clichés literally, treated the matter seriously, interweaving his answer with the standard coverage of tools and techniques, in order to demonstrate how a cartoonist thinks:

I spend little time at my desk during a week, perhaps 10 or 12 hours, and this is for the actual drawing of pictures. By the time I get to that, they are pretty well set, either in my mind or in extremely rough pencil sketches on scraps of paper. They're so rough they would make no sense to anyone but me. The rest of the time I spend with people. I like people, and from watching them I get my ideas. When I first started freelancing I used to scribble small drawings and captions on scraps of paper which I stuffed in pockets as the ideas occurred to me. Now I find I rarely do that.

Once in a while I write myself a memo, but habit is such that now I usually work on one of two plans. (1) I set myself a schedule for the week of two gags a day done roughly in pencil on typewriter paper. At the end of the week I have ten, working on a lightboard (a habit formed at Disney's). Then I redo them with a ballpoint pen and get them into the mail on Saturday morning. (2) Or, I do absolutely nothing all week until Saturday, when I get up early, sit down at my desk and say, "Okay, ten gags before the noon mail leaves." I haven't missed yet, although on some Saturdays I have to run all the way to the Post Office before it closes. In either case the batches often come bouncing right back with a rejection slip.

With Plan Two, I'll sometimes simply put the pen on a blank piece of paper and let the lines go where they may, so to speak. I'll draw a bathtub, perhaps, and spend five minutes staring at it. I'll put a man in the water—or maybe an octopus—or both. Then there will be a woman talking from the open door. What will she say? I stare at the sketch for another five minutes or so. What would be funny? Maybe I should have the man talking. I'll fill the woman's open mouth with teeth and open the man's mouth with heavy ink lines. Maybe he's fighting the octopus while talking. I put a few more arms on the man. By now the sketch is getting pretty incomprehensible. I might spend another long period of time studying the whole mess before coming up with something I think is pretty droll, or I might just decide the situation is pretty idiotic without being in the least humorous. At that point I chuck it and start in on another blank piece of paper.

When the okayed sketch comes back, my usual procedure—unless the editor has indicated radical changes, and this seldom happens—is to place a piece of Strathmore paper over the rough, secure with paper clips and proceed with brush and ink. It's almost a tracing; I seldom make any drastic changes. This is where the lightboard is essential. . . . When the drawing is finished, I letter the cap-



tion in blue pencil at the bottom, put my name and address on the back, place it in an envelope with a couple of pieces of cardboard and air mail it. You can't beat free-lancing for freedom. No matter where you are, a dime's worth of typewriter paper and a ballpoint pen put you in business.

"Boy! If looks could kill, eh, Steve?" is a typical one for me. It hinges on a literal interpretation of a cliché. In this case, I heard someone say, "If looks could kill," and I jotted down the line for possible future use. When the time came to do my weekly batch of ten roughs, I emptied my wallet of any paper scraps concerning jokes, checked my desk for the same and, faced with this stack of wrinkled, irregular paper, began to glean what I could from the barely discernible hieroglyphics. Up came the slip with "If looks could kill." My first sketch on this was simply for a look-see. It gave me an idea of whom I'd use in the cast. Sometimes a cartoonist is so close to the idea he's trying to portray that he will take too much for granted in staging it, and thus, when it's shown to another person, it will be a bit too obscure to go over as quickly as necessary. I always check my roughs with my wife to eliminate mistakes such as this. She need only say, "I don't get this one," and I have it back on the drawing board for revision.

My regular working set-up is at home. The loneliness of an office depresses me. Home gives me the feeling that human beings aren't too far away. I can hear the music of fighting kids, the wife's soap opera, neighbors visiting over back fences. My first "studio" was a in a closet in the main hall of a small house. Man, the traffic was terrific.

The Carmel Crunch

With the books, advertising jobs, and additional magazine markets (*Esquire*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *Paris Match*, *Punch*, *Cosmopolitan*) Vip was able to afford a Balboa Island beachhouse, an MGTC and a Jaguar MK IV. "Oh, I was big—drank Eastern beer, bought my booze by the case and smoked three-for-50¢ cigars. Sometime around 1958, the magazines were starting to dry up, and the kids were reaching the age when they started costing."

Vip felt the crunch as the weekly and biweekly magazines headed for collapse. When the great Golden Age of Single-Panels began a slow fade, he saw the caption-writing on the wall and sought salvation in syndication. His friend Hank Ketcham had been syndicated since 1951, and during a visit, Ketcham suggested that Partch do a syndicated gag panel titled simply Vip. Partch submitted 36 panels to Ketcham's syndicate, but he wasn't prepared for the sudden appearance, May 5, 1958, of Irving Phillips's fantasy humor panel and Sunday strip, *The Strange World of Mr. Mum*. As *The World Encyclopedia of Comics* observes, "Phillips's trick consists in his abolishing (or suspending) the laws of time and space (in this he carries Virgil Partch's experiments one step further)."

The *Mum* weirdness had an immediate popularity that kept it in the public eye for the next 16 years, with the deleterious side-effect of squelching the Vip syndicated panel forever. "My timing was bad. The syndicate had just signed Irv Phillips to do *Mr. Mum*. They felt that one offbeat feature was enough, and that trying to market two such features at the same time wouldn't be the smartest business move of the century. But there was no turning me off at this point. H.H. Anderson of Publishers Syndicate had queried me a few years previously, but being wealthy beyond my wildest dreams at the time, I balked at being shackled with those 365 days a year that I'd have to fill. Now I changed my mind and contacted Andy. He liked the idea but wasn't too ecstatic over the Vip approach. There followed innumerable trips to syndicate HQ in Chicago, ten thousand conferences, many starts, stops and revisions, and sweat, curses and tears before we concocted *Big George*." There were two years of such struggle before Publishers Newspaper Syndicate finally released *Big George* in mid-1960. With full promotion, the panel began in more than 300 USA/Canadian newspapers.

The Well-Tempered Strangeness

Featuring George's wife Helen and the dog Ajax as supporting characters, *Big George* was Partch domesticated; it read as if Vip had traded in all the wild fights of fantasy for a vision that went no further than his backyard. Fans of Vip's innovative work from the '40s and '50s were disappointed, and *Newsweek*,



"Pardon me, Miss, but could you hurry it up a bit?"

summing up Vip's career, noted that he had "tempered the strangeness" for *Big George*. "Alas," Vip admitted in 1967, "George wasn't as good as the advance publicity, and we started losing papers. Public reaction was quite mixed. The strange thing was that, before George, my magazine work sold mainly on a distinct, recognizable style with no central character or characters. The only constant thing in my cartoons was the signature 'Vip.' When young, aspiring cartoonists accuse us older, established guys of being able to sell material that is not as good as theirs, I'm afraid that occasionally I must agree with them. An established name and style do carry weight, but George changed all that. My signature plays second chair to him. I'm not beefing. George doesn't eat, but I do. And I'll only eat high off the hog if George does well, right? Right! So we started tinkering with him. After six years we think that we're on the right track, but who knows for sure? My fellow cartoonists said it wasn't my type of humor—no girls, bars, deserts. The stuff was too *Blondie*. (I only wish I could enjoy half the popularity of *Blondie*.) But once having established George as a family man living in an average middle-class house and so forth, this wasn't easy to do. It's dangerous to risk losing what following you have by radically changing your character. Any changes must be gradual. A study of some early *Big George* panels and some late ones will show the difference in his physical appearance, as well as that of his wife, Helen, and Ajax the dog."

Meanwhile, the books continued to fill out the shelf: *Drink and Be Merry* (Crest #331, 1959), edited by Lester Grady, collected together barroom poems, toasts, jokes and cartoons—many by Vip—with a Vip front cover. *Vip Tosses a Party* (1959) was followed by *New Faces on the Barroom Floor* (1961). And there were awards at international cartoon competitions—a first prize at the Brussels Cartoon Exhibition (1964), a first prize in Belgium (1966) and a gold medal in Italy (1966). "I've been in this little game of trying to guess public taste for 25 years now," wrote Vip, "and I'm far from winning every inning. But I've lucked out so far (knock on wood), and a great game it is. On the whole, this freelancer's life is my cup of tea. I'm a lovable boss to myself—work at home, take three-hour lunches and goof off at the drop of a hat. Of course there are moments when it all becomes so frustrating that I consider going back to animation, but, let's face it, freelancing has made me a very poor risk for a regular eight-to-five workday. Odd how a guy beefs about working 40 hours a week for someone else but will knock out 80 hours for himself and never let out a groan!"

Part of those 80 hours a week were spent experimenting with other syndicated strip possibilities. One such was an untitled

mid-'60s strip with a desert setting; he signed it with a pseudonym, "Beej," a nickname given him by his children. At the end of the '60s he moved into a new area—children's books—with *Christmas Cookie Sprinkle Snitcher* (Windmill, 1969). *Vip Quips* (Windmill/Dutton, 1975) uses a format of quick-sketch cartoons with all dialogue in rebus form.

In 1971, after contracting tuberculosis, Vip discovered he had eye problems, detailing his misfortune in a letter to Phil Porter:

The eye thing started rather early in life. I was born cross-eyed. After the bout with TB (picked up in Puerto Vallarta, 1971), my eyes, liver, etc., all seized up. Once I was in the TB ward, I set up a little drawing board and tried to catch up on my deadlines. A couple of papers ditched me because I was a hair late—that's why I'm now two years ahead, and plan to keep it that way! My secret: I do a daily every day, seven days a week, and a Sunday every sixth day. It puts me about two months ahead each year.

While in the TB hospital, I discovered one morning that I couldn't see to draw—couldn't even draw a margin. It spooked me, needless to say, and I rushed to the eye dept., where it was found that I had cataracts. The news came at the most inopportune time, since I was behind on my work schedule. The eye freaks gave me drops which dilated the pupil, thus allowing me to see around the faulty spot in my lens. So, with that stroke of luck, I immediately set up a work schedule to get six weeks ahead of my deadlines, in order to have the eye operation. It was so easy to do two days of work every day, since in the hospital I couldn't spend long lunches in bars, that I've been at it ever since—getting ahead, that is.

He began working with a headband magnifier, similar to the "magnifying snapdowns that engravers and counterfeiters use," but nevertheless increased his schedule to 30 hours a week, arising at five in the morning and working until noon. When Marshall Berges (*Los Angeles Times Home Magazine*) asked why he began so early, Vip answered, "Many years ago I asked that question of another cartoonist. He lived among a group of hard-drinking illustrators. They'd all go to lunch together and by early afternoon they were too stoned to do anything but sleep. My friend discovered that in order to get his work done, and keep up with his drinking buddies, he had to make his start very early in the morning. He was right. I adopted his schedule and found that it was a reliable way to survive the corrupting influence of evil companions, of whom I have many. By doing most of my work before noon, I can be just as wild as I please for the rest of the day."

By the mid-'70s Vip had sold to more than 150 magazines, filled a bookshelf with collections and original books, was well ahead on *Big George* while also doing a series, "I'll ask the Captain," for *Air California* magazine's *Fly Paper*. But it still wasn't enough. "I hate myself for not having anything to do for the rest of the day. I've got to start another feature. Been thinking about it for years, and I have a raft of ideas in a file." That raft of ideas set sail in 1977 with his *Captain's Gig*, described in a *Field Enterprises* promotional sheet as "a wacky comic strip that charts the zany antics of a frolicking, seafaring Captain, his side-splitting sidekick Alf, and a crazy crew of castaways. Just out of port, *Captain's Gig* set records for readership."

The Dangling Man

Helen Partch labeled Vip a "professional worrier." Surrounded by the signs of his success, Vip nevertheless viewed the freelancer's lot as a life of noisy desperation. After his eye surgery during the early '70s, his insecurities rose to the surface, and he drove himself harder than ever. Pressured by Helen Partch to "tell the whole truth," Vip was remarkably candid when he spoke about his worries with Marshall Berges in 1976:

I'm a very insecure person. I've been a professional cartoonist for more than 30 years, but I never know whether I'm going to make it. My career is precarious, like walking my way down the Nile River on an Egyptian waterwheel. Suppose I run out of ideas, or my eyes fail, or my health collapses? I live in envy of all those people who are paid regular salaries. A cartoonist on the staff of a paper has all kinds of built-in fringe benefits, like disability pay, medical insurance, hospitalization, a pension fund when he retires, perhaps a profit-sharing arrangement so he can enjoy a few of the nicer things in life. But a freelancer, as I am, lives in suspense, dangling like a puppet from the edge of a cliff. . . . Even when everything is going smooth-



ly, I invent worries. No matter how brilliantly the sun is shining, I can find dark clouds somewhere. I'm working on a new plan whereby a shrink can talk all my problems from my head down to my arm, then down to my hand, and finally down into one long fingernail. Then all I have to do is—wham!—clip the fingernail, and my worries will be gone. When you keep moving around as a kid, wondering who's going to swing at you next, you find yourself worrying constantly about being accepted, fretting about making new friends. When you grow up and work as a freelancer, you worry about rejection slips. I've lived with rejection slips for a long time. That's an inevitable part of the creative process. When there were lots of magazines, it didn't bother me too much. If Collier's turned down a cartoon, I'd sell it to The Country Gentleman. But most of the magazines have vanished, like flies in a hurricane.

The magazines have indeed vanished. Vip's hardbacks have vanished too, snatched from library shelves when librarians weren't looking. And his paperbacks, long out of print, have also vanished. Now Vip himself has vanished. Yet the Vipness lingers on. Today his earlier outre outlook has been so osmotically absorbed into the culture that we tend to forget the source of the seepage. In the '40s Partch machete-hacked aside the bland chorus-girl quips to clear a path for Gahan Wilson's parade of eldritch geeks. Along with Addams, the *New York Post*'s lunatic Stan MacGovern (*Silly Milly*) and Basil Wolverton, Vip helped set the stage for the onslaught of Harvey Kurtzman's *Madness*. Antedating the frog's legs frivolities of the *National Lampoon* was the sick joke craze of the late '50s; leaving no Rosetta Stone unturned, I flipped through Max Rezwin's 1960-62 "sick jokes and grim cartoons" collections (from college humorlines), startled to rediscover how Vip was the obvious high priest for the '50s' campus cartoonists—notably the University of Missouri's *Showme* gagster Dick Noel, who once drew a sadist offering a peanut butter sandwich to a man lost in the desert.

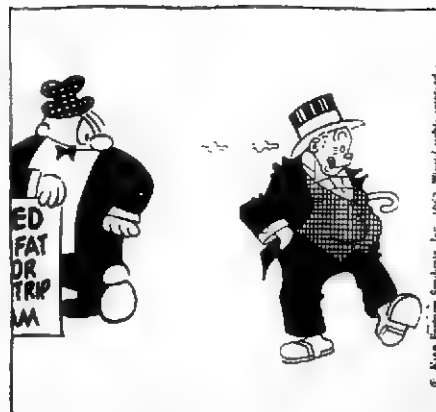
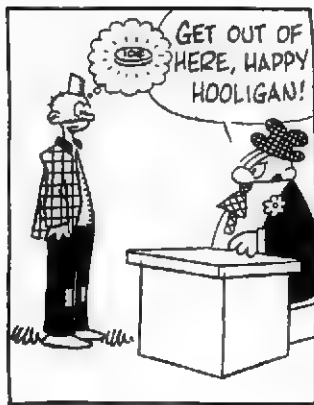
The most maniacal moment of Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* echoes a famous-long-ago Viptoon showing a man smashing his head through a bathroom door, yet coolly requesting, "Pardon me, miss, but could you hurry it up a bit?" Paul Kirchner's "The Bus" (*Heavy Metal*) no doubt revved up its engine on that far-distant Partched desertcape, and there's a hint of Vip in the reality-splintered gags of '80s comedian Steven Wright: "Today I was—no, it must have been somebody else." Yes, the Vipness lingers on.

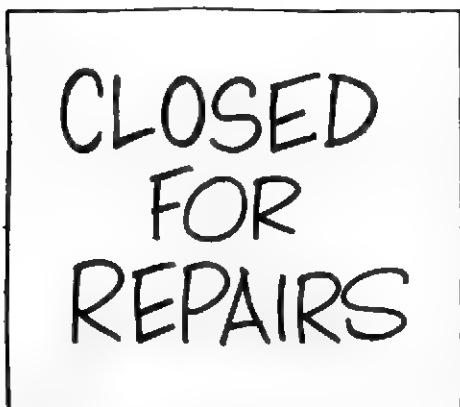
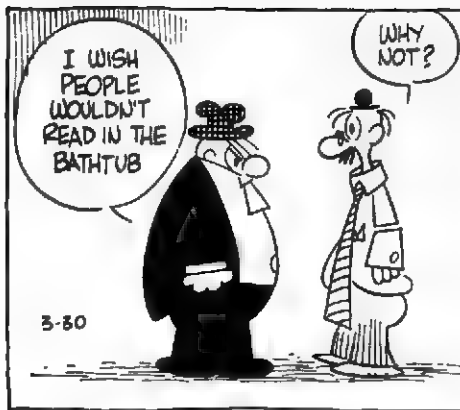
A very important person, this cartoon grandmaster who stabbed a hypodermic needle into American humor. And now, no more Vip. Well, not quite. Because he worked so far in advance of publication, numerous readers will never know he's dead. Thus, Vip has the last laugh. And since his syndicate claims a *Big George* backlog that can run until December 1990, it's the longest last laugh ever.

The Vipness lingers on. RIP, Vip.

SAM'S STRIP RETURNS!

by Mort Walker and
Jerry Dumas





Our Heroes' Hairbreadth Adventures: From Desperate Deeds To Wup-Wups

The Pioneer Story and Satire Strip *Hairbreadth Harry*

The popular *Hairbreadth Harry* ran as a Sunday page for 32 years and as a daily for more than 16. Its long life spanned the comics' formative years, and, in fact, added much to the art form.

Even though it had become one of the most popular and long-lived of strips (the *Katzenjammer Kids* and *Little Jimmy* were the only earlier ones still running at the time of *Harry's* demise), it would seem that it's hardly remembered today.

Hairbreadth Harry was created by Charles William Kahles. Kahles was a hardworking artist—perhaps too hard, as it reflected on his health. He began cartooning in the 1890s, soon after his family immigrated to New York from their native Bavaria. While still in his teens, his drawings appeared in *Grit*, of Williamsport, Penn., and *The New York Recorder*. Soon he was news assignment artist for the *New York World* and for a short time, *The New York Journal*.

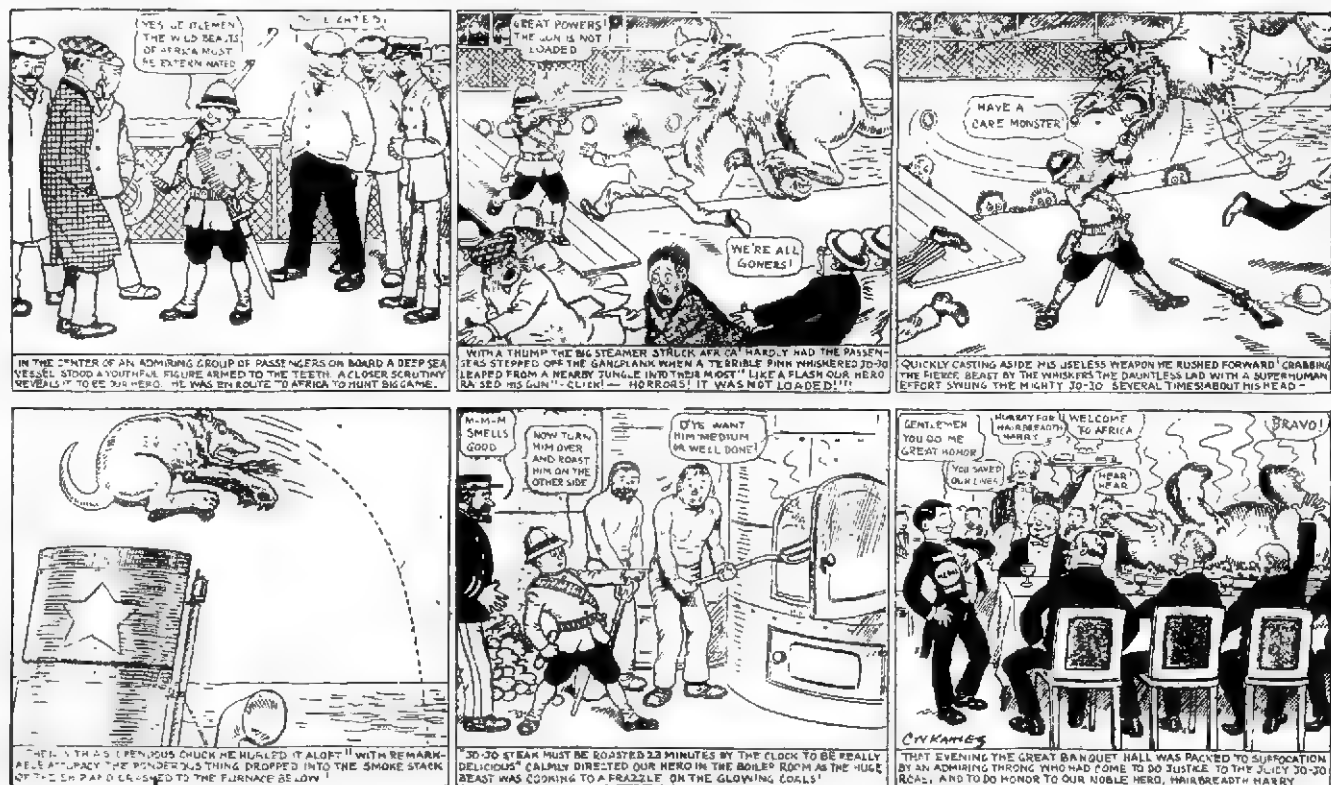
It appears that his first work in a syndicated comic section was a pair of gags that ran in

Pulitzer's *New York World* and *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on Independence Day of 1897. This was also the day of the first *P-D* comic section, making the Pulitzer material truly a "syndicate." Soon, Kahles put his talents to humorous cartooning only.

In all, Kahles either created or worked on at least 25 series, mostly before 1908. Though most of his work was with the Pulitzer organization, he did features for McClure, the

by Mark Johnson

From an African adventure of 1909, inspired by Theodore Roosevelt's big-game exploits that spring.



Collection of Mark Johnson



Top: C.W. Kahles in 1929

Above: An early representation of the three main characters, April 19, 1908.

Philadelphia North American syndicate, the Philadelphia Press syndicate, and later, the World Color Printing Co. of St. Louis.

At the Philadelphia Press he did three series: *Tatters and Turk*; *The Merry Nobles Three*, *They Never Can Agree*; and, beginning on October 21, 1906, *Hairbreadth Harry*. Originally Harry was a small, round-faced boy with black hair, dressed in a sort of roughrider outfit.

At first the title was *Our Hero's Hairbreadth Escapes*. This may be an intended parody on the word *hairbreadth*, commonly used in dime novels still popular at the time, or the work of illiterate typesetters at the Press, who were known on one occasion to misspell the word Philadelphia. In any case, the word became *Hairbreadth* on January 6, 1907, and then the title became *Hairbreadth Harry, the Boy Hero* on January 20th.

From the start *Hairbreadth Harry* showed much more ingenuity than most strips of the day, with its depiction of high adventure and danger of fantastic proportions, always resulting in the said hairbreadth escape, *a la* the dime novel.

In the first episode, Harry is treed by a bear while trekking through the woods. Just as he reaches the top of the tree, with the angered bruin only inches from him, an airship flies overhead and rescues him. In the second episode (November 18, 1906), Harry has a scary encounter with a school of sharks; and in the third, the next week, he saves a man from a firing squad by delivering a pardon in the nick of time. But the final two strips of 1906 are of some importance, for they were the first continued-story entries. They showed Harry kidnapped by a family of eagles on December 23, and his escape by tricking them with morphine pills disguised as berries on December 30th.

Although there was occasional continuity in some strips before this, it was not as a vital, integral part of the strip. Continued chapters had been experimented with previously. Oppen's Hearst strip *Alphonse, Gaston and Leon* had a three-and-a four-part series in April and May of 1903. These were supported by long explanations of the previous chapters. Therefore, though *Harry* wasn't the first to use the continued chapter format, it was the first strip to apply it as one of the basic components of its stories. *Hairbreadth Harry* was the first adventure continuity strip.

After combating all sorts of bad guys through the early months, the man who became his arch-nemesis, "Relentless Rudolph Ruddigore Rassendale," made his debut on March 3, 1907. At first Rudolph was a short, square jawed, square bodied tough guy with a thick handle-bar moustache.

Soon Rudolph became the archetypal villain—a tall, thin fellow dressed in top hat and tails, with a bony nose and toothy, evil grimace. He was the first arch-enemy, the grandfather of all comic strip bad guys to come.

Also in 1907, on September 22, the heroine of the story, "Belinda Blinks, the beautiful boiler maker," was introduced. The plotline now would sometimes take on the air of a 19th-century melodrama like "Blue Jeans," to accommodate the new situation. Mortgages, sawmills, and tied-to-the-tracks scenes all came to the strip. This was already a shopworn formula on the stage, but a novel idea to use it for comedy in a comic strip. At first, Belinda was hardly beautiful, and obviously many years older than Harry, but she gradually became younger and prettier.

Harry predated Skeeze as a strip character who grew up over the years. By 1914, both Harry and Belinda were the same age of about 20.

Once the stereotyped characters were introduced, the stories took off. Rudolph's evil schemes, aided by Kahles's unlimited imagination, lead anywhere. Rudy departed from his main goals—forcing Belinda to marry him, and/or destroying his rival, Harry—and turned to robbing banks, starting revolutions, counterfeiting, and so on. It was left to Harry to put the kibosh on Rudolph's plans.

The adventures were always farce humor, though they were indeed adventures. Of course there were no serious strips then, and in fact though a few attempts had been made it wasn't until 1929-30, when *Buck Rogers*, *Tarzan* and *Sherlock Holmes* appeared, that the impetus began.

Kahles satirized everything from Prohibition to crossword puzzles, all framed like a movie serial, with imagery now like the finest of silent comedies. The fantasy angle was vigorously pursued also. At any time Harry and company could become anyone else, and the characters re-introduced as rich or poor, peasants or kings, on various planes of reality, and then come back in the next story to begin again. Sometimes Harry had superhuman strength, in order to escape a jam Rudy has put him into.

Kahles was also the originator of science fiction in the strips. In a story lasting from February, 1912 to November, 1913, Harry and his troupe are taken via hurricane to the mysterious land of Wizzle-Wiz, where everything is weird and unreal. Some inhabitants have horns, tails, and numerous legs. There is an abundance of monsters here as in all of Kahles's work; he enjoyed this "nature-faking," creating the Great Grooly Wup-Wup, the Owl-Faced Bongo, and the Terrible Muggery-Juggs. In Wizzle-Wiz, many of the things that would later be everyday elements of standard space operas were introduced, including space ships and diabolical super weapons.

Rudolph pursued Harry and Belinda through the Press Syndicate pages until June 27, 1915, when the chase ended in marriage. This was hastily done, and ended the strip rather abruptly; in fact the whole syndicate ended on that date, presumably because it was no longer profitable. By this time Hearst had pushed out most of his competitors, and the smaller syndicates couldn't compete. For instance, the week following, the Press's rival Philadelphia *North American* tossed in the towel on their syndicate, as well.

Kahles kept busy doing ads, other strips, and spot gags in *Life* and *Judge*. But at the end of the year, the McClure syndicate saw potential in the *Harry* strip, and signed up Kahles to revive it; the second series began on January 16, 1916. This episode showed Rudolph as a hermit on a desert island, with nobody but a crocodile to talk to. It talks back. A steamer trunk washes on shore, and in it, there is a new suit, top hat and tails, and a newspaper, (*The Press*) with the headline "HAIRBREADTH HARRY AND BELINDA NOT MARRIED. RUMOR STARTED BY LAZY ARTIST WHO WISHED TO SHIRK WORK." Rudy immediately sets sail for home, to begin the chase anew.

McClure Sundays were always fulls, as opposed to the *Press* episodes which were usually half-pages. In Philadelphia, the *Press* ran the new McClure series until it folded in 1920. The *Public Ledger* picked up most of their features, and so popular was Harry with Philadelphians that the *Ledger* decided to add him to its own syndicate, recently started. The first *Ledger* syndicate Sunday was May 20, 1923, and was accompanied the next day by the first daily, *Hairbreadth Harry*.

Harry came to the movies in the form of Weiss Brothers Happiness Comedies' two-reelers about 1925. Kahles himself didn't have a part in their production, and didn't care for them, but so few comic strip stars moved to the screen that this demonstrated a measure of Harry's popularity.

The content of *Hairbreadth Harry* reflects Kahles's personality. He was a well-read man, enjoying chess and classical music. *Harry* was arguably the 1920s most satirical and intellectual strip. Politics, social institutions, movies, and Wall Street were all satirized in a way that would be fun for children as well as adults. The dialogue was always a mixture of Victorian stage prattle and American slang, with a touch of fanciful gibberish. This style of writing, attributed to S.J. Perelman and others, was completely developed in Kahles at the turn of the century. Kahles, as a cartoonist, was also one of this century's great humorists.

C.W. Kahles died on January 21, 1931. *Harry* was taken over by F.O. (Franklin Osborne) Alexander until 1939, and Inferior Ledger ghosts continued it until the strip was finally put to rest on January 17, 1940.

Hairbreadth Harry has seemed unjustly forgotten. Certainly it inspired, even subconsciously, the future greats of adventure strips. The several histories of comics have unfortunately said little or nothing about *Harry*; in some instances, more notice and praise is directed toward Harry Hershfield's frantic imitation, *Desperate Desmond*.

This collection of *Hairbreadth Harry* should show the fine type of material created by C.W. Kahles, a forgotten comic-strip immortal. n

Silk Sock Sam, the Slick Sleuth, shown here on May 7, 1911, was one of several Sherlock Holmes characters Kahles created.





HAIRBREADTH HARRY

By C.W. KAHLES

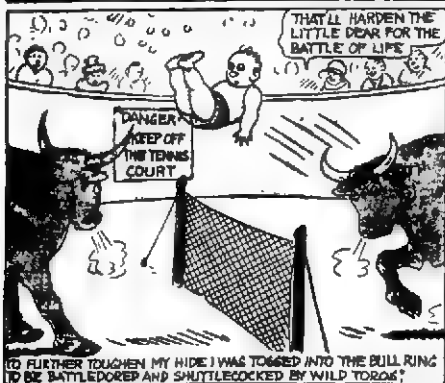
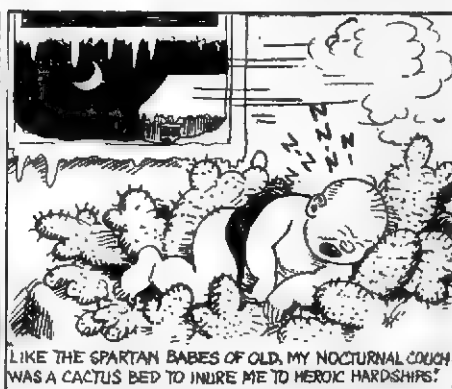
A SHORT AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF OUR HERO



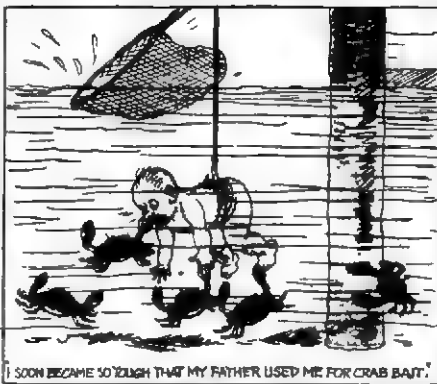
"I KNEW ON THE DAY I WAS BORN, WHEN THE NURSE BOUNCED ME OFF THE FLOOR, THAT I WAS DESTINED TO BE A HERO."



"I REMEMBER CUTTING MY TEETH ON IRON WASHERS AND OLD SHOES."



"TO FURTHER TOUGHEN MY HIDE I WAS TOSSED INTO THE BULL RING TO BE BATTLEDORE AND SHUTTLECOCKED BY WILD TOROS."



"I SOON BECAME SO TOUGH THAT MY FATHER USED ME FOR CRAB BAIT."



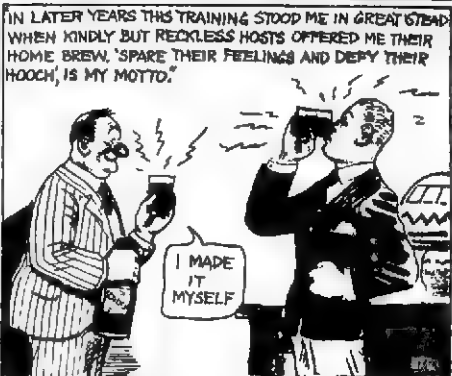
"THE WOODSHED HELD NO TERRORS FOR ME."



"AT A VERY TENDER AGE I WAS SENT OUT TO FIGHT INDIANS."



"WHEN QUITE A LAD I BEGAN TO PRACTICE DEFYING THE LIGHTNING."



"IN LATER YEARS THIS TRAINING STOOD ME IN GREAT STEAD WHEN KINDLY BUT RECKLESS HOSTS OFFERED ME THEIR HOME BREW, 'SPARE THEIR FEELINGS AND DEFEY THEIR HOOSH', IS MY MOTTO."



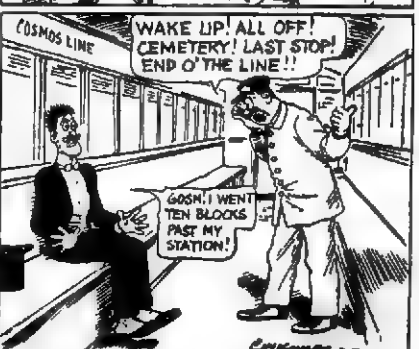
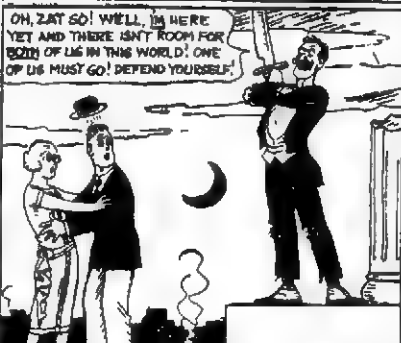
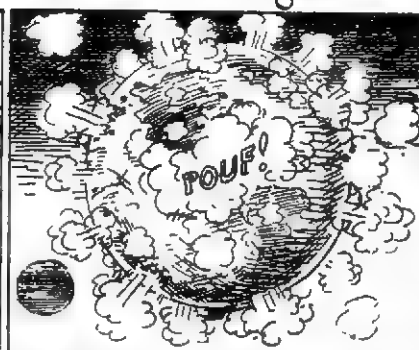
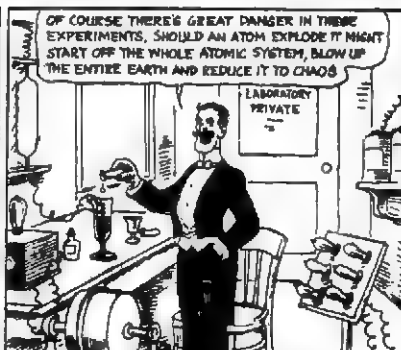
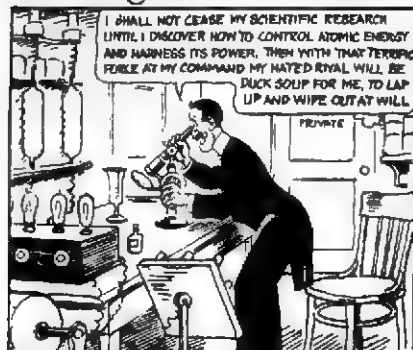
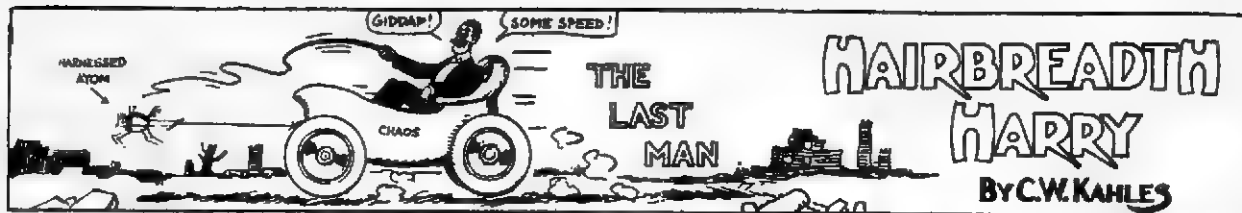
"YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ME! HELP!"



"WHY-ER-YES, SIR! YES, SIR! STEP THIS WAY, SIR."

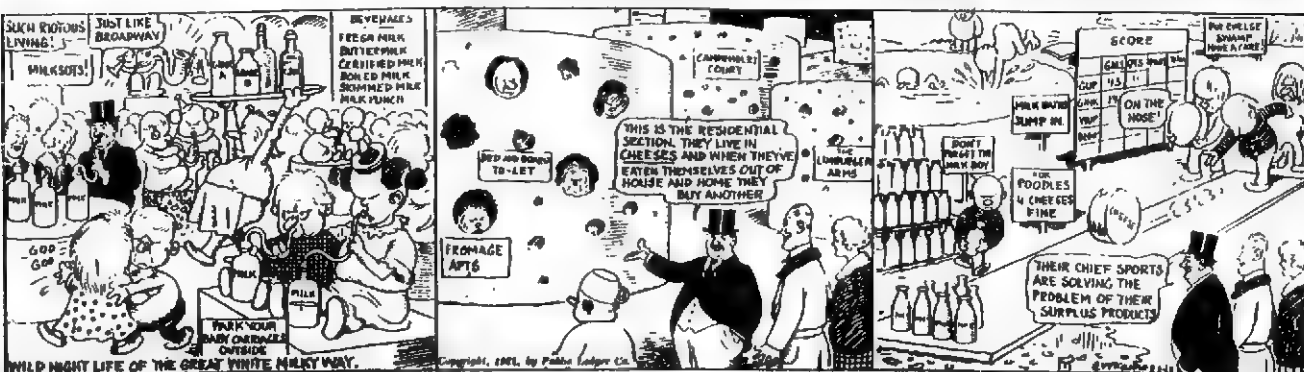
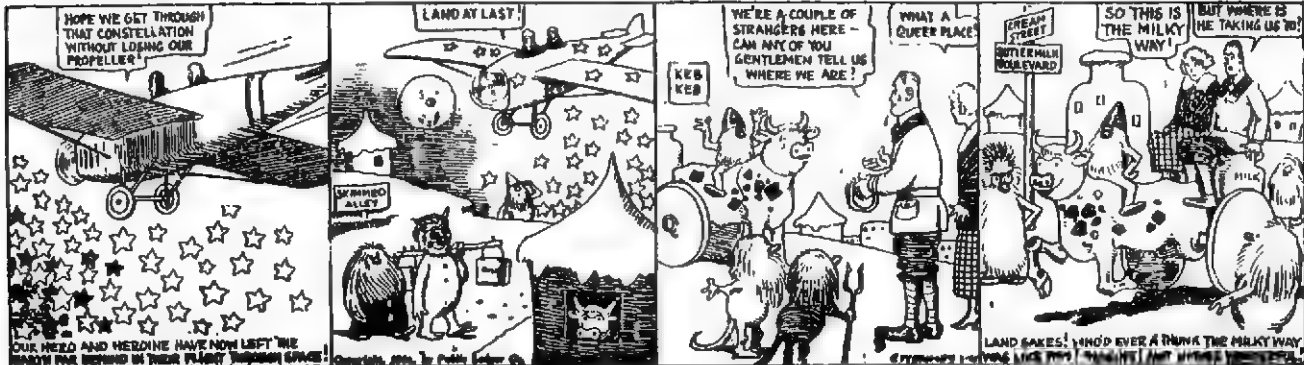


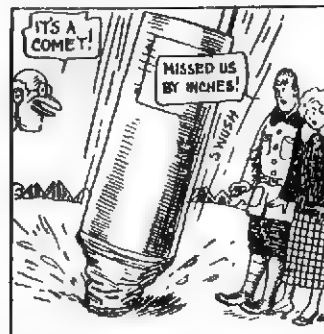
"BUT EVERY TIME I HEAR A MOTORCYCLE COMING BEHIND I GET QUEER QUALMS AND A STRANGE FEELING OF IMPENDING DOOM!"



A prophetic strip of July 19, 1925, showing Rudolph unleashing atomic energy. Nearly 20 years later to the day, scientists exploded the first A-Bomb in the New Mexico desert, hoping against the outside possibility of setting off a chain reaction destroying all life on earth.

Hairbreadth Harry in "Through Time and Space"





THE NEXT MOMENT A FIERY OBJECT LANDED PLUMB AT THEIR FEET!!



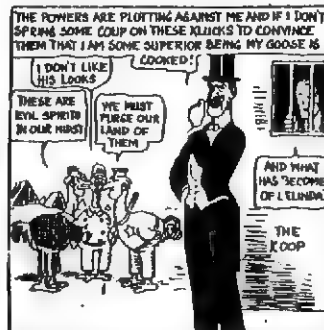
AND AT THE SAME INSTANT A FLAP OPENED, DIS- CLOSING THE BALEFUL LAMP OF RELENTLESS RUDOLPH!



AND HE'S RIGHT AT HIS OLD TRICKS Copyright, 1981, by Public Ledger Co. Cuckoo-9-2



IT'S TOO BAD THAT RUFFIAN HAD TO GO AND RUSS UP THIS NICE LITTLE PARTY! THE UNIVERSE IS A SMALL PLACE AFTER ALL, ISN'T IT? BUT TO-MORROW



HERE'S HOW THE SITUATION NOW LOOKS IN THE LAND OF KLUCK-KLUCK: OUR HERO IN JAIL ON RUDOLPH'S CHARGE THAT RUFFIAN UNDER SUSPICION OF KLUCKS AND BELKIN-



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RUDOLPH PUT IT OVER ALL RIGHT AND IS NOW KING- P-M IN THE LAND OF KLUCK-KLUCK! (MORE AWK)



YOU SEE, RUDOLPH PULLED A BIG DEAL WITH THE KLUCK- KLUCKS WHEN HE SAVED YOU FROM THE KOOKOOKLUK!



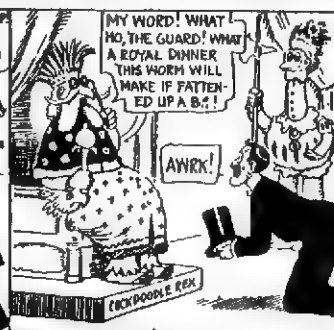
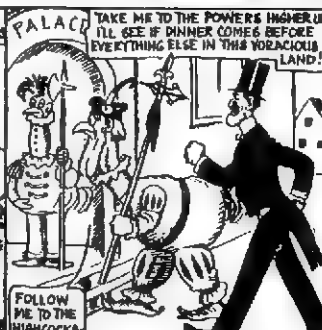
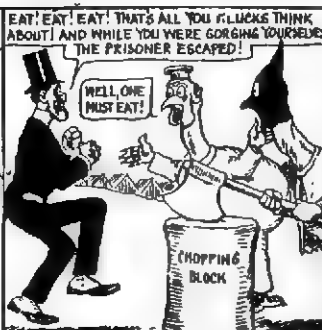
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A STRANGE CUSTOM BUT IT GIVES OUR HERO A SLIGHT RESpite FROM THE FATAL AX. (CONTINUED TO PAGE 10)

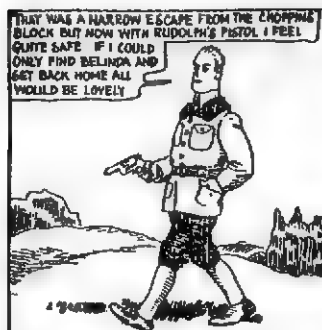


JUSTICE IN KLUCKLAND IS INEXORABLE BUT NOT SO INEXORABLE AS THE CLAMOROUS URGES OF APPETITE.

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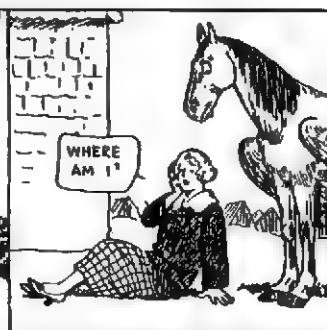
FOLLOW ME TO THE HIGHCOCKA- LORUM, SIR

HATS OFF, EVERYBODY! YOU ARE NOW IN THE AUGUST PRESENCE OF THE GREAT COODCOODE VII, HIGHCOCKA- LORUM OF KLUCKLAND, HIMSELF!! (CONTINUED TO PAGE 11)



THAT WAS A NARROW ESCAPE FROM THE CHOPPING BLOCK BUT NOW WITH RUDOLPH'S PISTOL I FEEL QUITE SAFE IF I COULD ONLY FIND BELINDA AND GET BACK HOME ALL WOULD BE LOVELY

YES, BELINDA? WHAT OF HER? AND PEGASUS? WE'LL HAVE TO CUT BACK A BIT AND SEE WHAT'S WHAT.



WHERE AM I?

WHEN RUDOLPH LANDED IN THE ROCKETS BELINDA SWOONED AND IN THE EXCITEMENT SHE WAS FORGOTTEN FOR THE MOMENT AND WHEN SHE CAME TO



WHAT'S THE IDEA?

PEGASUS SWUNG HER ON HIS BACK



MY GOODNESS ME! WHAT A REATLESS LIFE!

AND FLEW OFF WITH HER! AND THAT'S EVERY LAST WORD WE KNOW ABOUT THE GELL - HONEST IT IS! BUT SHE MAY TURN UP AGAIN LIKE A BENT PIN.



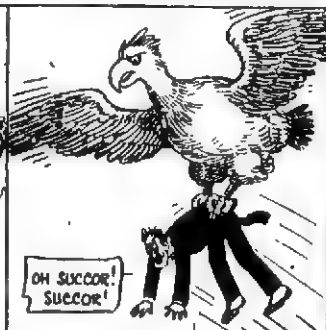
HAN ORDERS IS TO FEED YOU FOR DE KING'S SUNDAY DINNER

CORN! CORN! NOTHING BUT CORN! CAN'T YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING ELSE?



IT'S THE KLUCK HAWK!

ROYAL FATTENING PEN



OH SUCCOR! SUCCOR!



THAT'LL COST ME MY HEAD

DAY HAWK'S CHILLERS MEBBY NEEDS NOURISHMENT MOW DAM DE KING

THE KING KOCKPOODLE SEEMS TO HAVE TAKEN QUITE A PLEASURE TO RUDOLPH AND WE WISH HIM JOY OF HIS REPEAT

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EXIT RUDOLPH! BUT DON'T DESPAIR! THIS WILL LEAD UP TO A PERFECT THRILLER TO-MORROW!



TRY ME IN HAZARD IF THERE ISN'T BELINDA

YES RUDOLPH!



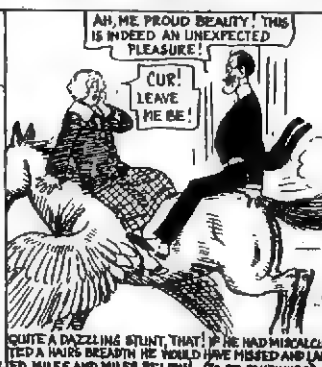
FORTUNATELY I HAD THIS KNIFE IN MY POCKET! THIS MUST BE DONE WITH GREAT CARE

OH GOODY! THAT MONSTER HAWK IS TAKING HIM TO ITS PERIE EYRE FOR FODDER



NOW IS THE TIME! LEGGO, YOU BRUTE!

WHAT CAN HE BE UP TO?



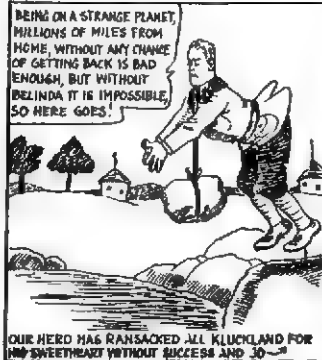
AH, HE PROUD BEAUTY! THIS IS INDEED AN UNEXPECTED PLEASURE!

CUR! LEAVE ME BE!

THE PATHS OF OUR AERIAL TRAVELERS CONVERGE

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QUITE A DAZZLING STUNT, THAT! IF HE HAD MISCALCULATED A HAIR'S BREADTH HE WOULD HAVE MISSED AND LANDED MILES AND MILES BELOW! (TO BE CONTINUED)



BEING ON A STRANGE PLANET, MILLIONS OF MILES FROM HOME, WITHOUT ANY CHANCE OF GETTING BACK IS BAD ENOUGH, BUT WITHOUT BELINDA IT IS IMPOSSIBLE, SO HERE GOES.



COME TO MY ARMS, PRETTY ONE! NO USE TRYING TO ELUDE ME ANY LONGER, YOU ARE AT THE END OF YOUR LINE

STAND BACK, MONSTER! ANOTHER STEP AND I'LL



JUMP TO ETERNITY!

CHEATED OF ME PREY!



HARRY!

BELINDA!

OUR HERO HAS RANSACKED ALL KLUCKLAND FOR HIS SWEETHEART WITHOUT SUCCESS AND SO

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HERE'S LUCK! BELINDA FELL IN PRETTY GOAT! NOW ALLS WE A UNTIL SOMETHING ELSE HAPPEN



I HOPE NO WILD ANIMALS ATTACK ME BECAUSE THIS LITTLE BEAN-SHOOTER IS THE ONLY WEAPON I HAVE

HOPEY DODDY! NOTHING HAS HAPPENED TO ME SINCE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY



GOODNESS THEY HAVE LARGE MOSQUITOS HERE!

HELP!



SAVE ME!

A FORLORN HOPE! WHAT IS THIS DINKY SLINGSHOT AGAINST A MONSTER LIKE THAT!



INSECT!

BAFFLED!

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PING! WENT THE PEBBLE, AND POW! WENT THE SKEETER!

BUT IT WAS ONLY RUDOLPH'S RUBBER BALLOON THAT BLEW UP - SERVES HIM RIGHT!

